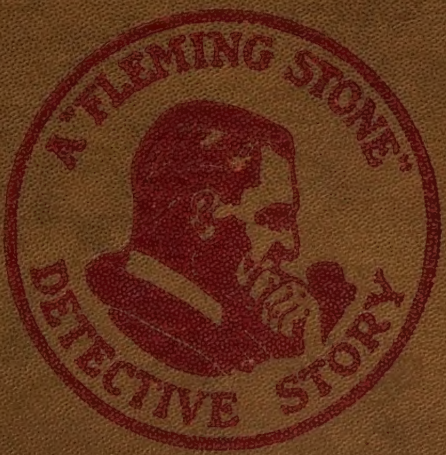
THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

CAROLYN WELLS



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THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

CAROLYN WELLS'

Baffling detective stories, in which Fleming Stone, the great American Detective, displays his remarkable ingenuity for unravelling mysteries

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THE RED-HAIRED GIRL
THE BRONZE HAND
THE DAUGHTER OF THE HOUSE
PRILLILGIRL
ANYTHING BUT THE TRUTH
THE FURTHEST FURY
SPOOKY HOLLOW
FEATHERS LEFT AROUND
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A CHAIN OF EVIDENCE
THE CLUE
THE GOLD BAG

PTOMAINE STREET

A Rollicking Parody on a Famous Book

THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

A FLEMING STONE STORY

BY

CAROLYN WELLS

Author of "Vicky Van," "The Daughter of the House," etc.

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
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1926

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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
DOTTIE DORAN

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THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

CHAPTER I

LLOYD COMES HOME

LLOYD CONVERSE was a square man. Once a gay young flapper had described him as a big, footbally kind of chap.

And he was. His wide, square shoulders told truly of his athletic prowess at college, and his thick, dark hair had some refractory locks that fell over his brow as often as he tossed them impatiently back.

His face was rather square, too, because of his wide, low forehead, and his wide, firm jaw.

But aside from his physical characteristics, Converse was square mentally and morally as well. Not that he set up to be an angel or a little tin god, but he had an instinct for squareness that was to him what conscience is to New Englanders.

As a schoolboy he had played square and fought square. As a business man, he was as square in the spirit as in the letter of his dealings. And now he was in love, and he proposed to treat that rather important matter squarely.

He sat in his Pullman chair, in the fast flying

train that rushed determinedly through the landscapes of diminishing picturesqueness, which, placed end to end, reached from the Adirondack region to New York City.

As is usual with travellers, the first hours of his journey were devoted to reminiscences of his somewhat strenuous vacation, and regrets that it was over and he was on his way back to daily work.

But as he moved farther and farther away from the enchanted woods and streams of the mountains, his mind veered round to the present and the future, when he should be back in New York with his brother and his friends, and best of all, with the girl whom he now knew he loved.

He had not been quite certain when he left her, for Lloyd Converse was not a man of snap judgments or sudden decisions.

But long silent nights under the stars, and long happy days in the forests had shown him the truth and taught him to know his own heart.

And as his nature was one of optimistic cheeriness, he couldn't help hoping, even believing that the lovely prize he had set his heart on, might some day be won.

Converse, owing to his square principles, had a strong sense of justice.

Indeed, it was almost an obsession with him. Let justice be done though the Heavens may fall, was to his notion a very mild way of putting it.

He would have rather said: Let justice be done though the Heavens fall, and also the earth and the sea, and all that in them is.

Justice was his fetish, his God.

Never in his life had he resented a punishment, a slight, an insult or a threat, if he had brought it on himself, if it were an act of justice.

Never did he hesitate to mete out punishment or reward if such action represented justice.

And so, in justice to the girl he planned to win, if possible, he began to take inventory of what he had to offer her, and decide if in justice to her, he might dare the venture.

He was a younger son, and though that does not always signify in our country as much as it means in England, yet his father had seen fit to leave his large fortune almost entirely to his older son, George, with the understanding that he would duly and properly provide for his brother.

But George Converse had warped ideas of justice, or, at least, so it seemed to Lloyd. George was square enough, as far as that meant honesty and integrity, but generosity had been omitted from his list of virtues.

He had not Lloyd's love of luxury, his taste for fine and beautiful things or his ambitions for marriage, home, and family.

Though a very rich man, George was in many businesses. He did little actual work, to be sure, but

he was director on this and that board, chairman of this and that committee, and because of his sound judgment, and wide experience, he commanded many and ample salaries.

Lloyd did none of these things. Though he, too, had good judgment, and quick, keen insight, he was not brilliant, but rather of the safe and sane type of mind.

So George had more, much more money than he knew what to do with, and it did seem to Lloyd's overweening sense of justice that George was not doing the square thing by him.

He was not whining—that wasn't his nature—but he felt that it was only right that he should have more of the brothers' patrimony than he was now receiving. Especially as he was thinking of marriage, and naturally wanted to make a proper home for a bride.

So he was planning a straightforward talk with George about it. He hoped George would see reason, and would agree that he, Lloyd, was justly entitled to a larger portion of the inheritance.

His father's will, he felt, had been unjust, but since the money had been left the way it was, he must try to make George see the truth.

Cheerily, he hoped for the best, and though he thought about it, he was not downcast, nor deeply anxious as to the outcome.

But his square jaw set rather firmly as he made

up his mind what he would say if George proved obstinate.

The brothers still lived in the old New York house where they had been born and brought up. It was one of those old-fashioned, brownstone, high-stoop affairs, of which many yet remain on the East Side cross-streets in the eighties.

Though not really remodelled, it had been brought up to date in the way of heating, plumbing and such matters, and the old furniture and decorations were beloved by both brothers as lifelong surroundings and associations.

The house had been closed all summer, and Lloyd knew it was not to be opened for use until the next week.

Then their small but efficient household staff would come and would soon get things in running order.

But Lloyd didn't mind the prospect of an empty house for a few days, with furniture swathed in linen shrouds and chandeliers wrapped in misty white tarlatan. He was an experienced and efficient camper, and could easily make a bed for himself and rustle his own food as long as might be necessary.

He was in no hurry. His train had been late in arriving, but mindful of the untenanted home, he stopped in the station restaurant for a midnight supper, and so, when his taxi drew up to his own front door, it was almost one o'clock.

He jumped out, collected his suit-case, and a few odd parcels, and paying the driver, mounted the brownstone steps.

The street was only moderately light, and he saw no one about, but to this he gave no thought, and pushed his night key into the latch, with the determination to tumble into bed as soon as possible.

The house, on the north side of the street, was built on the usual lines.

A vestibule, then the long, narrow hall, terminating in the dining-room, which ran across the back of the house.

On his left, as he entered was a long room, that his parents had called the parlor. Now, it was dubbed the library, and was the common lounging-room of the brothers. The floor over it was George's, and comprised a front sitting-room and a bedroom behind it, with a large and modern bathroom between.

Precisely the same arrangement on the floor above that, was Lloyd's.

Another story, as well as some rooms in the basement provided the servants' quarters, and on the whole, the home was as comfortable and satisfactory as two young men could wish.

Lloyd looked into the library, even snapped on a side light, but seeing nothing but the striped linen covers on the chairs, he switched off the light and went on upstairs.

The stairs, against the right-hand wall, made a

turn as they neared the top, and as Lloyd's eyes came up to the floor level, he fancied he saw a faint glimmer of light beneath the door of George's bedroom.

He felt sure it was merely his fancy, or, possibly some reflection of a street light, but he opened the bedroom door and looked in.

There was not a light there, but there was one in the bathroom, which explained the gleam he had noticed.

"Either burglars," he said to himself, "or old George is home. Queer, anyway."

He pushed on the bedroom light, and its soft glow showed the bed ready made and turned down, but quite evidently not having yet been occupied.

He stepped through to the bathroom, a commodious affair, utilizing all of the space which those old houses devoted to passage-way, wardrobe, and wash-stands.

Now, it was done up in shining white tiles and sparkling silver plate. On the tiled floor lay a white bath mat, with a blue Grecian border.

And in the very centre of that mat was a clear and distinct wet footprint obviously made by a bare foot.

"He's home," commented Lloyd, to himself, as he stooped and felt of the footprint and found it wet.

"Hello, old George, where are you?"

As he called out, he opened the door and went on

from the bathroom to the front room, which was his brother's sitting-room.

And there he saw, half crumpled up in a large arm-chair, the form of George Converse, with a ghastly, gaping wound in the back of his head, and terrible crimson stains on his clothing, on the chair, and on the carpet.

Stunned with horror, Lloyd drew a step nearer, and nerved himself to feel for his brother's heart. It was not beating, and a second look was not required to know for certain that George Converse would never breathe again.

All this Lloyd had seen by the light that came in from the bathroom.

He switched on the sitting-room light, an overhead one, and saw more clearly the awfulness of the tragedy.

He fell, rather than sat down, upon a couch, and hid his face in his hands.

Brave enough in active danger, Lloyd was dazed, stupefied, in the face of this calamity.

He sat silent a long time, trying to pull himself together, for every time he glanced at that fearful sight, he felt his nerve going, and feared that he might lose consciousness.

But at last, he began to get his wits about him, began to realize what had happened and what he must do about it, began to see the situation and prepare to meet it.

George was dead—George had been murdered. These two facts burned themselves into his waking brain.

The slowness of his comprehension was not due to a sluggish intelligence or a mediocre intellect. Lloyd Converse was a sharp-witted and deep-thinking man. But the shock, the sudden blow, had momentarily thrown him off his balance, and it was a struggle to find himself again.

Had the victim of the crime been a stranger, no one could have thought and acted more quickly and more wisely than he. But because it was his brother, whom he deeply loved, in spite of the money troubles between them, Lloyd's heart and brain were paralyzed by grief and horror, and he couldn't think rationally.

On the table, near the dead man, he saw a tray with whiskey and a siphon. There were two glasses, one of which was partly filled. The other was empty and seemed clean, so Lloyd poured himself a drink.

The liquor gave him a grip on his nerves, and he forced himself to look more closely at his brother.

It seemed obvious that the attack came from behind; that as George sat there, unwitting of danger, someone had crept up behind him, and had shot to kill, with deadly success.

Instinctively, and half unconsciously, he looked about for the weapon.

It lay on the floor, near the chair where the dead

man sat. A revolver which Lloyd immediately recognized as George's own. A thought of suicide flashed through his mind, but was at once dismissed, as nobody could shoot himself in the back of the head—or, at least, so it seemed to Lloyd.

He picked up the revolver, and looked at it carefully. Yes, it was surely his brother's. A Smith and Wesson, .38, which George always kept in the table drawer in case of burglars.

Lloyd put it away in the drawer where it belonged, and then his grief overcame him afresh.

"Poor old George," he said, stroking the cold hand, "who did it? Who could have done it? And what must I do now?"

For it had begun to seep into his bemused brain that he must call somebody—doctor? Police? What did people do in such circumstances?

He went back to George's bedroom, for the telephone was on his night table there.

As he passed through the bathroom, his attention was caught again by the wet footprint on the bath mat.

Somehow that seemed to him very strange.

It must be George's footprint, of course, for the murderer would scarcely have taken a bath—and yet, why would George take a bath, so recently that the footprint was still wet, and then dress himself again, completely, even to his street shoes? Had George taken a tub, he would have put on dressing-

gown and slippers—the print on the mat roused Lloyd at last to alert thinking.

He was in no sense a detective, he had never claimed detective instinct, but he had always been interested in puzzles, and an inexplicable occurrence always attracted his attention.

The bath mat was a fine one, and so of a close, firm weave. The footprint, while not definite in detail, was clearly marked as to outline, and it occurred to Lloyd that it might be useful as a clue.

But, though it was still wet, it would soon dry, and would leave no trace. He felt he must somehow make it permanent, or get a copy of it, for the investigation that would come later.

He thought of taking a photograph, but that was almost impossible in the circumstances.

He tried to draw round the outlined edge with a lead pencil, but it made no mark on the pile of the cotton mat.

Then, he had an inspiration.

He lighted a match, and blew it out, and with its burned end, he drew the outline of the shape. It required several matches, for the charred point soon wore off, but Lloyd had patience, and he persevered until he had a complete outline of the footprint marked on the rug.

"Can't get it," he murmured to himself. "Wonder how long it takes a wet footprint to dry. Anyway, that was made within the last half hour, I'll

bet. And George never took a bath and then dressed himself again even to his shoes and his tie, at this time of night. I don't get it!"

He went on to the bedroom. The dresser was in perfect order, brushes, files, and shoe-hooks laid in an orderly row, after the manner of a careful housemaid. He felt sure his brother could not have undressed for a bath, leaving the dresser top untouched. Had he thrown down his collar and tie, something would have been disarranged. Had he undressed and dressed again, he would surely have brushed his hair, and no man would put a brush back again in its conventional place.

Yet it was much more absurd to imagine his murderer taking a bath!

That was too ridiculous.

He looked about the bedroom. All was in the careful order to which he was accustomed. Maggie, the housemaid, was the daughter of old Sarah, the cook, and the girl was well trained and efficient. He recognized her handiwork in the arrangement of the whole room, the clean floors and spotless appointments. Even the way the bed was turned down showed him that Maggie had arranged that room for George's arrival.

He wandered back to the bathroom. The foot print was fading now, as it dried, and he was glad he had made sure of its outline.

A wet washcloth lay in a squeezed-up wad on

the washstand. Absent-mindedly he tossed it into the clothes hamper.

One or two towels lay on the floor, and these he picked up and hung neatly on the towel rack.

All the time his thoughts were formulating his next actions. He knew he must telephone for the police, but he had an inherent dread of beginning the investigation that such a summons would bring about.

He wanted his brother's death investigated, he wanted the murderer discovered and punished, he wanted the mystery of that footprint solved, but he fairly shuddered at the outlook. He hesitated to make the call that would set in motion all the horrid machinery of police and detectives and witnesses and evidence and all that.

Yet it must be done.

Or should he call Doctor Kent first? Yet what could a doctor do? George was dead. The police—yes, surely, that would be right—Headquarters, of course.

He felt very much alone. Should be call Mr. Whitney, George's lawyer?

But it was so late—it was already after two o'clock.

He gave one more glance at that footprint on the bath mat.

It was almost dry now, and the black outline stood out clearly on the soft white surface.

He fell to thinking again. That footprint, to his knowledge, had been there nearly an hour. He had never tested such a thing, but he would have thought any wet footprint would dry in about half an hour. Well, this one hadn't, but it struck him that it couldn't have been there long before he came in, that was sure. And certainly not long enough for George to have dressed completely, even lacing his shoes, and then to have gone into his sitting-room and to have been murdered.

No, since that footprint was made, there could not have been time for all that.

Anyway, that's how it seemed to Lloyd. Well, then, the murderer made that footprint.

But it was silly, to think of a man committing a ghastly murder and then calmly taking a tub in his victim's bathroom!

Yet, just supposing he had done so, the same argument held. How had he dressed again, and taken his departure before Lloyd arrived?

Perhaps he hadn't. Perhaps he was in the house yet. For in the deathly stillness of the place, Lloyd was sure he would have heard the front door open and close.

With a sudden impulse, he ran from the room, downstairs, and searched the whole of the first floor. Then on to the basement, and went through the kitchen and pantries.

Everything was in order. Everything was in summer trim.

The man Thorp, who doubled as butler and valet to the brothers, always left everything that way. The cook, Sarah, always too, had her kitchen belongings and appliances in perfect order.

Accustomed to these conditions, Lloyd would have noticed anything unusual. Nothing was, that he could see. The kitchen door, which gave out on a paved back yard, was locked and bolted. The front basement room, a sort of servants' sitting-room, was undisturbed, and the front basement door was locked. To be sure, it was a spring latch, and could be opened from the inside, but beyond that was the area gate, an iron grill, which was locked with a padlock.

Lloyd went back upstairs, peering about in each room as he passed. He went on to the third floor where his own rooms were, for he felt he must examine the whole house before he relaxed his search.

His own rooms were not prepared for him, as he had not been expected until the following week.

His bed was covered with a large cambric dust spread, and the furniture was in slip covers.

He put on the lights and looked about. Nothing was wrong. There were no towels or soap laid out in his bathroom, but that he had anticipated.

His sitting-room, too, was merely in vacation array.

Leaving his apartments, he went on up to the fourth floor.

He looked about curiously. He had not had occasion to come up here for years, but he remembered playing here, as a child.

Now, it was remodelled with two pleasant, cheery, maids' rooms, and a bath. The rest was storerooms, for Thorp slept in a room in the basement.

Yet nothing could Lloyd see that looked in the slightest degree suspicious or suggestive of an intruder, and he found no hiding culprit, no hidden clue to give him any hint as to the man who had brought about his brother's death.

He went back to George's rooms, and feeling that he should never be able to do what he had to do, otherwise, he took a couch cover from the sofa, and spread it over the silent form.

Then, though he was always a moderate drinker, he took another portion from the whisky bottle, and so nerved himself for his ordeal.

He went to the telephone by George's bed and called Headquarters.

"Hello," came the response.

"There has been a murder committed, and I want you to send your people here at once."

"Who's killed?" came the question.

"George Converse."

"Where?"

Lloyd gave the address in the east eighties, and only one further question was asked him.

"Who are you?"

"His brother, Lloyd Converse. Shall I call a doctor?"

"Nope. The medical examiner will come. You stay right there, and don't touch anything. Not anything—see?"

"I see," returned Lloyd, and hung up the receiver.

But from that moment his whole demeanor changed.

His dazed feeling left him. He was alert and alive to the last degree. He looked carefully about, not with any idea of concealing evidence or providing it, but with a strong desire to have everything exactly as it was when he came into the house.

His suit-case, which he had left in the hall, he took up to his own rooms.

He took the revolver out of the drawer where he had unthinkingly placed it, and laid it on the floor, as nearly as he could remember where he had first seen it.

Then, with trembling fingers, he reverently lifted the spread he had laid over his brother, and restored it to its accustomed place on the couch.

Composed enough, now, he examined the dead man, but without touching him. It was a horrible sight, but now Lloyd was on the warpath, and wanted

only to learn or discover any bit of evidence, however small, that might help to solve the mystery of George's death.

He could see nothing helpful, however, and he sighed at his own inability, for, he felt sure, trained eyes could find much.

But, so far as he knew, or remembered, everything was now exactly as it had been when he came into the house, except that the footprint had entirely dried and the irregular black outline showed where it had been. He was glad he had made that outline, for surely such a strange clue must be of assistance to the police detectives.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINT ON THE MAT

THE police arrived. Medical Examiner Jarvis began at once his examination of the dead body, while Inspector Gray and his Lieutenant, named Young, stood silently taking in every possible detail of the room.

Lloyd Converse said nothing, as he awaited the words of Doctor Jarvis, who soon spoke, saying:

"Shot from behind. Here's the weapon."

He picked up the revolver from the floor, handling it carefully, and laid it on the table.

"How long has he been dead?" asked the Inspector, in calm, even tones.

"Not long. Maybe an hour, maybe two hours."

"Tell your story," Gray said, turning to Lloyd. "Sit down, men. Take it easy, Mr. Converse. No hurry."

"My story is brief," Lloyd responded. He didn't like the cold-blooded, fishy-eyed Inspector, and he unconsciously assumed an air of hauteur. His square shoulders seemed more square as he flung back his fine head and looked his questioner straight in the eye.

"I have been spending my vacation in the Adi-

rondacks. I did not intend returning home until next week, but continued bad weather made me feel fed up with the place, and I concluded to come along down to New York. I knew this house was closed, but I had a latch-key, and I was willing to rough it here, until I could get the servants back. My brother, I knew, was down on Long Island at a house party, and I came here, expecting to find the house empty. Instead I discovered my brother's dead body. I searched the house over, but found no person nor any trace of intruders, except one thing, which may or may not be a clue to the murderer."

The three men listened attentively to Lloyd's statement, and without showing doubt, their faces betokened an evident desire to hear more.

"Your brother didn't expect you here to-night?" asked Gray.

"He had no reason to do so. I didn't myself think of coming home until last night. Then I packed up and came down to-day."

"How did your brother happen to be here?"

"I've no idea, but he evidently planned to come, and advised the servants of his intention, for his bed is made and his rooms are in order. My own rooms are still dismantled, as they always are through the summer."

"It was then, merely a coincidence, that both you and your brother were in this house to-night?"

"So far as I know, it is merely coincidence. He had not told me he was coming, nor had I told him I was."

The medical examiner then spoke.

"What is the clue you referred to?"

"It is this." Lloyd rose and moved toward the bathroom. "When I came in the house I saw a glimmer of light under George's bedroom door. I opened it, and found there was a light in the bathroom. And on the bath mat was a wet footprint of a bare foot."

The men stared at him.

"That doesn't seem remarkable to me," Gray said. "Might not your brother have taken a bath?"

"But, Inspector," Lloyd said, earnestly, "the print was wet still, and it seemed to me it was wetter than it could have been after my brother had had time to dress again. And, too, why should he bathe, and then dress again completely, even to his shoes and tie, at that time of night?"

"And so you deduced it was the footprint of the murderer?"

"I thought it might be. Though I admit it is even more absurd that the murderer should have taken a bath, and dressed again, which he must have done before he departed.

"Let us see that footprint."

"It is dry now," Lloyd told them, as they fol-

lowed him into the bathroom. "But I took the precaution to draw its outline while it was wet, in case it might be of value as evidence."

"You were extremely foresighted," remarked Lieutenant Young. "Very foresighted indeed, I should say."

Something in his tone made Lloyd turn quickly to look at him. But his face was inscrutable.

Not so the Inspector. He definitely suspected Lloyd Converse had killed his brother, and he was almost ready to say so.

He looked at Lloyd frowningly, and said:

"What did you draw that outline with? Charcoal? How did you happen to have it handy?"

"I used burnt matches," Lloyd told him, keeping his poise, and looking calm, but with the calm that hides turbulent passion.

"Clever—very clever," said Young, with unconcealed sarcasm. "And that wet footprint was there when you came into the house?"

"It was."

"How long does such a print stay wet, Inspector?" Young said.

"Never tested one, but I should say half an hour or so. At what time did you arrive, Mr. Converse?"

"I don't know, exactly. But it must have been about one o'clock. My train was due in the Grand Central at midnight. But it was late, and also, I

stopped in the restaurant for some supper, knowing there would be no food in this house. So, I think I reached here just about one."

"And you telephoned for the police at two. What were you doing in the meantime?"

Lloyd stared. The question showed direct suspicion, and it was the first time that it really came home to Lloyd that he could be suspected. Of the death of his own brother! Of George's death—George's murder!

But Lloyd Converse was not one who weakened in emergency. He squared his shoulders, he squared his jaw, and replied tersely:

"I was searching the house for traces of the murderer."

"For a whole hour?"

"Part of that time I sat stunned at the tragedy I had discovered. Part of the time I spent tracing the outline of the wet footprint, as it seemed to be of importance. And the rest of the time I spent in going over the whole house to find an intruder or some evidence of one."

"Very good." The Inspector herded them back to the sitting-room. "And now, we'll ask for your finger-prints, if you please."

The Lieutenant produced his paraphernalia, and Lloyd's finger-prints were secured.

"This revolver, now," Gray went on, while

Young worked with the finger-print outfit. "Whose is it?"

"It is my brother's," Lloyd replied.

"Where was it usually kept?"

"In that table drawer."

"Then must we not assume that the murderer was some person well enough known to his victim, to enter the room where he sat, secure the weapon from the table drawer, and put it to a deadly purpose, without calling forth any resistance and struggle, on the part of the man who was shot?"

"It would seem so," Lloyd returned, with utter absence of resentment or any sign of fear.

"Mr. Converse, have you any suspicion of the identity of your brother's slayer?"

"Not the slightest." He spoke emphatically, but after an instant's hesitation. "I have told you the exact truth, and I want you to discover the murderer."

"I think we shan't have to look far," said Young, who had developed his finger-prints sufficiently for his purpose. "We don't need enlargements, Inspector. I find on the revolver, no finger-prints except some of Mr. Lloyd Converse's. Also, I find on this glass," he lifted the glass from which Lloyd had taken his high-balls, "only the same finger-prints. On the other glass, I find other prints which I suspect to be those of Mr. George Converse, and this can be easily verified or disproved."

With his quick, efficient motions, Young set about printing the dead man's fingers, and soon announced his assumption correct.

Lloyd's finger-prints were on the revolver and on one glass. George's were on the other glass.

The suspect sat unmoved.

"It may seem like circumstantial evidence against me," he said quietly. "But it is misleading. When I came in and saw that revolver on the floor, I picked it up and put it back in its drawer."

"Why?" the Inspector flung the question at him, with a stern frown.

"I don't know why. Partly because I was dazed with the shock of my discovery, and I put it away instinctively. Then, when I telephoned, and your man said to touch nothing, I restored the pistol to the place on the floor where I had first seen it. That is the explanation of my own finger-prints on it."

"Ingenious!" exclaimed Young with patent disbelief. "And the whisky glass?"

"Yes, I used that. I found the bottle and the siphon there, with one used glass, doubtless my brother's. I took up the other glass and mixed a high-ball for myself. Twice I did this, feeling the need of the stimulant."

"You'd better keep quiet, Mr. Converse," the Inspector admonished him. "Every word you say seems to incriminate you deeper. You'd better have counsel."

"Counsel?"

"Yes. Man, can't you see where you stand? You come in here late at night, you stay an hour alone with your brother. Your brother is dead, and only your fingerprints are on the weapon that killed him, as well as on the glass that stands beside the one he used himself. It requires but little imagination to reconstruct the crime. You two drank together, then for some reason you quarreled, and in the heat of passion, you snatched the revolver from its place and shot your brother—from behind——"

"Stop!" Lloyd's anger blazed forth. "I didn't shoot my brother, but if I had, I should not have shot him from behind! I am incapable of such a thing as that!"

His looks and his tone carried conviction, but the Inspector shook his head. The evidence was too strong, too direct for doubt.

"What about that wet footprint?" said Jarvis, who had spoken little, but had thought deeply.

"That's all a fake," said Young, contemptuously. "As we have seen, Mr. Converse here, has a brilliant imagination. He conceived that footprint idea as a bizarre and interesting clue. Only a warped and criminal mind could have invented that."

"You mean I made it myself!" Lloyd exclaimed.

"Made the tracing, yes, of course. But there never was any wet footprint there. I have carefully examined the feet of the victim, and I am convinced that his shoes have not been removed from his feet

since he came into this house. As you can see, the dust that is in the creases of the leather, and even in the points where the laces cross one another, is undisturbed. Had those shoes been taken off and put on again, that dust must have been displaced a trifle at least. It is plain to be seen that no fingers have touched those laces since the wearer of the shoes was out of doors."

This was palpably true. There was but a slight dust, but it indubitably lay on the leather and the laces undisturbed, which would have been impossible had even careful hands unlaced and relaced the shoes.

"Therefore," summed up Young, "if there was a wet footprint, as Mr. Converse states, it was not made by Mr. George Converse. And no rational hypothesis can argue its being made by a murderer who was an intruder from outside. Such a one would be in too great haste to get away from the scene of his crime, and, too, who can imagine a murderer taking a tub after his grim deed had been accomplished?"

"He may have been bespattered with blood," said Doctor Jarvis, thoughtfully, "and took a bath to clean himself. The wound scattered much blood, the murderer stood rather close——"

"Nonsense, man!" Young cried. "Even so, the man would not undress and take a tub bath! That would not cleanse his clothing, which, of course carried most of the incriminating spots. But a resi-

dent of the house might have cared to bathe, in order to remove the unpleasant feeling of a brother's blood upon him. Though I incline to the opinion that the footprint is entirely a flight of fancy, and as the children say, 'put in to make it harder,' it is too careful a clue to be real. Too good to be true. And as an indicative footprint, it means nothing. As it is outlined there on the mat, it would practically fit the foot of any man here present."

They nodded their heads, for the black marks on the mat were wavering and uncertain, by reason of the yielding cotton surface, and as Young said, it might fit almost any man.

"And as to your man who took a bath," Young went on, "where are his towels? I see no used ones about."

"There were two on the floor," Lloyd said, slowly. "I folded them and hung them on the towel rack."

"Why?"

"Again, I can only say, that I did it unconsciously —instinctively. I was stunned, dazed, and I scarcely knew what I did. But I acted to the best of my intelligence as soon as I collected my wits. I searched the house lest someone be in hiding, and then I telephoned Headquarters."

"Having waited an hour before you called up."

"Perhaps so." Lloyd spoke with the utmost calmness and his voice was quiet and cold, but at

heart he was terrified. What was before him? Suspected of murdering his brother—and all the evidence in the case apparently against him! What must he do? What could he do? It passed through his mind that he had been advised to have counsel. Well, he would get counsel, then. Who should it be? Whitney was the only lawyer he knew. He was George's lawyer, for Lloyd had only rare occasion for legal services, but Whitney was clever and capable, and surely, *surely,* he would believe Lloyd's story. He had known the brothers for years, and he knew the affection and congeniality that existed between them.

There was a pause, and then Lloyd said:

"Look here, men. I admit that circumstances do look black against me. But I did not kill my brother, and I've no idea who did. My story of the wet footprint is absolutely true. I traced it, hoping it might be a valuable clue in the hands of a detective. But I see it is not, and so that's that. My whole story is true, I did just what I have told you I did, and nothing that I haven't told. Now, as has been suggested, I want counsel, for though I am honest and sincere, I am no match for a suspicious detective, who is ready to twist the truth into a seeming lie, and who calls my statements figments of a criminal brain."

Lloyd's tones were scathing, but they made not the least impression on the phlegmatic Young.

"All right, young feller," he said, impertinently, "you want to get your lawyer to-night?"

"Oh, no," and Lloyd realized that it was after three o'clock. "I shall call in Mr. Whitney—Harrison Whitney, and I'd rather not disturb him at this hour. Can't it wait till morning?"

"Yes, I suppose so," the Inspector told him. "There's more to be done here. We must examine the body further, eh, Doctor Jarvis?"

"Yes, of course. Whitney's a good man, Mr. Converse, you couldn't do better. He's had a lot of criminal cases."

"Don't go too fast, Mr. Young," said Lloyd, in icy tones. "You have no right, as yet, to call mine a criminal case. Just because you are prejudiced in my disfavor, and have misread the existing evidence, that does not justify you assuming my guilt. I shall call in Mr. Whitney to-morrow morning—this morning, rather—as early as I consider proper. Until then you can keep me under such surveillance as you choose. If allowed, I should like to go to bed, as I can tell you no more than I have told, and I am exceedingly weary and worn out."

"Well, go ahead, Mr. Converse," the Inspector told him, not unkindly. "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't. No use your attempting to bolt—you can't put it over. But go on upstairs and get what rest you can. We'll take charge here, and if you're wanted, you'll be sent for."

With one last sorrowful glance at his brother's body, Lloyd went up to his own rooms to rest. He had no intention of going to bed, but he wanted to get off by himself to think things over.

He was in a pretty bad hole, no doubt of that. He wondered whether Whitney could get him out or not.

There was plenty of money—if it was to be a question of money.

For, he knew, George's will left all the large fortune to himself.

And then it struck him for the first time, this fact was one more bit of damaging evidence against him! It supplied motive. So now his accusers could prove motive, opportunity and means! The lonely house, the handy revolver and the need of money. For it was no secret that Lloyd wanted money and wanted George to give it to him. More than once he had asked the lawyer to use his influence with George to make over to him a portion of the paternal fortune. And Whitney had agreed to try, and had tried, but George was obdurate.

Lloyd felt no shame or embarrassment at wanting this money, his sense of justice had always rebelled at the way his father's will had been made. And Whitney had agreed with him, saying that when he drew up the will of the elder Converse, he had urged a more nearly equal division between the brothers. But Mr. Converse had argued that Lloyd was extravagant, and would squander a fortune,

while George was thrifty, and would save and increase the capital, and also, he would give his younger brother all he ought to have.

But as years went by, George had become more and more given to hoarding, and less and less inclined to be generous to Lloyd.

So, now, with a contemplated marriage ahead of him, Lloyd had planned to ask George frankly, as man to man, if he did not think that he, Lloyd, was entitled to a fairer share.

Lloyd had not expected to see his brother until some days later, and had planned to talk the matter over with the lawyer first, and be guided by him as to the best manner of approaching George. But he was hopeful as to the outcome, for the brothers were really the best of friends, and Lloyd's conduct of late had been most exemplary in the way of proper economy and freedom from foolish extravagance.

And now, with the motive, which was sure to come out, of wanting much money, and with the exclusive opportunity, Lloyd was forced to realize that there was a strong case against him, and could only hope that Harrison Whitney's cleverness could find a way out.

At any rate, he thought, nothing could be done until morning, and he decided to call up the lawyer as early as seven o'clock.

He threw himself into a big easy-chair, lighted a pipe, and gave himself up alternately to dreams of

the girl he hoped—or had hoped—to win, and the horrible nightmare which had come to him in the last few hours and which refused to be ignored or forgotten.

Meanwhile the men downstairs were making further important discoveries. The articles in the dead man's pockets had been taken out and laid on the table.

They were mostly of no evidential value, being the usual handkerchief, knife, pocket-book, small change, lead pencil, and such like.

But among them was a bit of yellow paper, on which Young quickly pounced, exclaiming:

"A telegram!"

It was torn in half, and only the lower part of the form remained. But the message was intact, and read:

"Dear Brother. I will be at the house late Monday night. Meet me there. Lloyd."

"I guess that settles it!" the detective cried, triumphantly. "Don't want much more, do you, Inspector?"

"It would seem not. Where was this man?"

"Down on Long Island somewhere, his precious brother said. It will be easy to check up on that. He must have received this wire down there, and came home in response to it. I don't believe he had been here long before Lloyd arrived, for he didn't change

his clothes or anything, and there's not much whisky gone from the bottle."

"General deduction, but might be faulty," Gray smiled. "Maybe this is a second bottle."

"Not likely. The empty would be about somewhere. And, somehow, I don't see the brothers as drinking men. Do you, Doctor Jarvis? Can't you tell from the dead man whether he had been drinking a lot or not?"

"Can't tell positively until after the autopsy, but he looks as if he had died sober. And Lloyd Converse was not at all under the influence. If, as he said, he had two drinks, they were small ones."

"About three or four small ones have been taken from this bottle," Young said, musingly, holding the bottle up to the light. "Shouldn't mind one myself—it looks like——"

"Drop it, Young!" said the Inspector, severely. "That's evidence, and must not be tampered with."

"I know it," and the detective set the bottle down with a little sigh. "Well, what next? Look over the desk for papers, I suppose."

He set to work investigating the desk that stood against one wall, while Gray rummaged through the table drawers.

Doctor Jarvis went into the bathroom, and sat down on the white stool here, while he thoughtfully scrutinized the outline of the footprint.

"I think there was a wet print here," he said

at last, and Young came and joined him. "See, the surface of the fabric inside the outline is a little matted and pressed, as if it had been wet."

"Well, even so," Young declared, "Lloyd made it. Either he took off his own shoes and stockings and made the print, or else he drew the outline first and sopped water inside afterward. Clever, I'll say, but a little too bizarre. He has a diseased mind, no telling what scheme he is even now trumping up. I've a notion to go up and see what he's doing. I don't believe he went to bed. A man with an accusation of murder hanging over him isn't going to lie down and go by-by."

"Oh, leave him alone," Gray urged. "We can work better without him and we've a lot of searching to do. We ought to go over this whole house. No telling what we'll find."

"Look at George's bed," the Inspector said, suddenly. "I thought there were no servants here. Who turned that down so neatly?"

"Maybe George himself," opined Young, "and maybe there is a servant about the place. Me for the kitchen quarters. Often servants or servants' belongings tell tales."

He went downstairs to the basement, Gray took it on himself to go through the rooms on the first floor, while Doctor Jarvis stayed by the body of the dead man and endeavored to read from it some hint toward solving the mystery of his death.

CHAPTER III

THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

Inspector Gray soon completed his survey of the first floor of the house, and found nothing of interest. The library and dining-room were in order and their formal tidiness showed the general oversight of a competent caretaker but no sign of other occupancy. A July magazine or two on the library table seemed to indicate that the place had been vacant all summer.

So Gray went on downstairs and joined Young in the basement.

"Any luck?" he asked.

"Nothing startling. It's evident the servants were apprised of George's return, for here's a pile of stuff from the market."

He pointed to a table where were provisions in a motley heap. Eggs, bacon, coffee, bread, and fruit. Opening the icebox door, Young saw milk and butter.

"You see," he said, "George telephoned the cook or the butler that he was coming home, and so they hastily ordered some groceries, and made up George's room for him. Lloyd was not expected, as his room is not made up."

"But George expected his brother, for he had that telegram."

"Well, then he said nothing about it to the servants, or they would surely have fixed up Lloyd's bed, same as they did George's. However, they'll probably show up here at seven o'clock or thereabouts. Or, if you say so, we'll send for them to come here earlier. Get their numbers from Lloyd."

"Look around a bit first. What's that front room, a dining-room?"

"Yes, servants' dining and sitting-room. The house seems very well run."

They went into the front room, and Young picked up a handkerchief from the floor there.

"Fancy, but fairly good," he commented. "Look at these red spots on it."

Gray took the handkerchief, a small one, of pale green linen with a ruffle round it of fine net. Also there was an embroidered F in one corner.

Gray scrutinized the spots.

"Not blood," he declared. "Probably lipstick or rouge. This can't be the cook's?"

"Her daughter is the housemaid, it's hers, I suppose. Yes, those crimson daubs are from a lipstick. Well, that's no help. The whole thing looks to me like an open and shut case. George comes up here to meet Lloyd, at Lloyd's request. They are alone in the house. They quarrel. Lloyd shoots his brother, spends an hour fixing up a dinky footprint

for a red herring, and then yaps for the police. Too easy."

"I'm not as sure as you are, but it does look that way. What sort of lock is on the front door down here?"

Young went to examine.

"Ordinary spring lock," he returned. "Can be opened from the inside, but needs a key to open from outside. But here's an iron gate from the area to the street and this has a padlock. So nobody went out this way, unless a servant, with a key to the gate."

Gray stepped outside and looked through the iron grill. He saw a policeman on the beat, who stared back at him.

"What's up?" said the policeman in the street to Gray behind the grill.

"Murder," said Gray, succinctly. "Come inside, will you? Not this way, go up to the front door."

Gray, followed by Young went upstairs and let in Officer Binns, who listened, open-mouthed, to the tale unfolded to him.

As it progressed, he grew red and embarrassed of aspect, and shuffled his feet nervously.

He was new to the locality, and knew little or nothing of the residents there.

"Did you see anything during the night?" Gray asked him, noting his evident embarrassment.

"Well yes, I did. But I didn't think anything was wrong."

"Well, what did you see? Spill it all, Binns."

Binns sat up straighter, and began his tale with the stolid air of the unimaginative narrator.

"It was 'long about 'leven or twelve,—say half past 'leven, when a gentleman come along and went up the steps of this house. He spoke fair to me, and said 'Good-night, officer,' as he passed me. I was just in front of the house. He let himself in with a night key, and a few minutes later, I saw a light on the first floor. Then that went off and I saw a light on the second floor, and I concluded the man was going to bed. So I went on about my business, and when I passed the house again, there was still a light in the front room on the second floor. All was quiet, and I saw no reason to worry, so I went along.

"But later, as I came onto this block, I saw a girl come out of the basement entrance. A girl or a woman."

"Could you see her plainly?"

"Not so very. But by the moonlight I could see she had red hair,—oh, a lot of it. Bobbed, but sorter longish bob, and very frizzly. She had on a dinky little hat, one of those little thimble affairs all the girls wear. But her red hair stuck out from under it forty ways for Sunday."

"Did you watch her?"

"I watched her, yes. But I thought she was a servant, coming out the area door, so. Yet she seemed like a lady, too. Well, I watched her, and what do you think she did?"

"What?"

"As soon as she was out on the street, she whips out a little vanity gimcrack, you know what I mean, and fixes up her face!"

"How could she see?"

"Oh, there was light enough for that. Well, she peeks into her little mirror, and she dabs on powder and paint to beat the band. Then she pulls her hat down like and jaunts off."

"You had time to look at her. How was she dressed?"

"I had time, but I didn't notice her clothes much. She had on a dark coat, sort of tailor made, and a kind of full skirt, light colored, showed below the coat. It was terrible short, and she had on those stockings that look as if they weren't there, and slippers. That's all I saw."

"A pretty girl?"

"Dunno; I didn't see her face much, 'cause she was repairing it. But she was a tallish, solid sort, not one of these little wispy things, and she was so quiet behaved and mindin' her own business like, I didn't see no reason to speculate about her."

"Where'd she go?"

"Over toward Fifth Avenue, and as I was goin' the other way, I just went on."

"You're new here, Binns?"

"Yes, sir."

"Otherwise you'd have known there is no such person belonging to this house. That is, I don't believe there is. The brothers Converse are conservative men, and they wouldn't have a servant of the type you suggest. Nor would she be leaving the house so late, alone."

You're only surmising that, Inspector," Young suggested.

"Yes, but there's foundation for it. You know yourself, that the servants of this house would most likely be of the old school."

"Can't always get servants of the old school, nowadays."

"Well, we can soon find that out. Maybe we'd better call Lloyd Converse down and ask him about this red-haired girl. She may be the murderer, you know."

"She carried a small suit-case," said Binns, with a sudden recollection.

"Oh, she did. Well, she is certainly very interesting. If you can't tell us any more, Binns, you'd better get along, and report here again, when you're off duty."

"That's all I can tell, sir. But she didn't seem like a servant. She had an air of——of importance

like, and her a fixin' up her face as free and easy as if she was in her own boodore."

"They all do that. They use a lipstick in church, if they feel like it. I say, Young, that was her handkerchief, then, that you picked up."

"Yes. Must have been. All over red stuff."

"Well, hop it, Binns," said Inspector Gray. "And I think," turning to Young, I'll take forty winks on the couch here. If anything turns up, call me.

"Tell Doctor Jarvis he can do what he thinks best about taking away the body, and that. Maybe, he'd better go home and come back in the morning. You can hold the fort, Young?"

"Sure. Get a snooze, Inspector. I'll look after everything."

And so silence settled down on the Converse home.

The medical examiner departed, promising to return at seven, to perform the autopsy, and Young took up the post of watcher over the dead body of George Converse.

The detective thought deeply, and now and then, in response to some suggestion of his active brain, he rose and went to some other room, to hunt around.

On his return from one of these expeditions, which had taken him to the basement, but had produced no result, he found Lloyd Converse in the room with his brother's body.

Lloyd was sitting at the desk, looking over some papers.

"Nothing must be disturbed, Mr. Converse," Young told him, in a cold, crisp tone, that sounded hostile.

"I am not disturbing anything, Mr. Young," Lloyd returned, evenly and with a decided hauteur. I am looking over my brother's papers."

"So I see," Young returned, but something in Lloyd's demeanor prevented his voicing the caustic comment in his mind.

He said, instead; "Have you a servant in your employ, Mr. Converse, who has red hair?"

"No. Unless one has been employed during my absence. We have but three; a butler, who is also general utility man, a cook, and a housemaid, the daughter of the cook."

"This housemaid, now. She hasn't red hair?"

"No, indeed. Maggie's hair is black. Why, who is this red-haired woman?"

"That's what we want to know. She was seen leaving the house late last night. Did you take any papers from that desk, Mr. Converse?"

"I did not. Tell me more of the red-haired person. You say she was here?"

"Yes. Left the house about one o'clock."

"Then she killed my brother." Lloyd stared at the detective.

"Oh, don't go too fast. We've no proof of that."

"No, that's true. Now, see here, Mr. Young, I know you suspect me. And so, I don't propose to discuss the matter with you at all. It's getting on to five o'clock. By six, I propose to call up Mr. Whitney, my lawyer, and I shall be guided by him in my future procedure. If he isn't awake, I can get his household anyway. Then, I'll get him as soon as he is available."

"Yes, you'd better do just that, Mr. Converse. And you mustn't be wrathy at me for a very natural supposition. Before the red-haired girl came into the story, you were the only one known to have been here with you brother last night. Now the girl makes all the difference in the world. Yet maybe she hadn't a thing to do with it. You're sure you didn't take any papers from Mr. Converse's desk?"

"I'm sure I did not. Search me, if you like," and Lloyd threw open his coat with a permitting gesture.

"No, I believe you," but Young looked closely at the inside pockets.

Lloyd Converse had recovered his normal poise. He had not slept at all, but a long, quiet spell of thinking had restored his sanity of judgment, and he saw plainly how black was the evidence against him.

Nor did the idea of the red-haired girl help him much. He felt sure she was a new servant, or a friend of some one of their own staff. He could not persuade himself that she was a visitor of

George's, and his declaration that she had done the shooting was an impulsive remark that he didn't really think was true.

However, he knew that almost anything he could say would only get him in deeper, and he resolved to keep a silent tongue until he could confer with the lawyer. Harrison Whitney was not only widely informed in legal matters, but he was a master of diplomacy, and would very likely see a way out that Lloyd hadn't thought of.

He went back to the bathroom and regarded, meditatively, the footprint he had outlined.

"It could be a woman's foot," he thought to himself, saying no word to the watching detective. "The moisture would naturally spread, and make the print larger than the foot that made it. Who in the world can she be?"

He didn't deny to himself that his brother might have had a visitor of the gentler sex, who might have held almost any relation with the dead man. Yet, he could not reconcile the idea of such a guest leaving by the area door. Unless, that is, she had killed George herself. Then, of course, she would choose the least conspicuous way out of the house.

"You must find that woman," he said to Young, and his authoritative tone showed the detective that Lloyd Converse was by no means cowed at the suspicion hanging over him.

"Of course," said Young, airily, "that must be done."

"Can you do it?"

"Wasn't it Napoleon who said, 'If it is possible, it will be done. If it is impossible, it shall be done!' Well, that's my answer."

"A fine answer, but have you the Napoleon who can put it over?"

"Maybe," said Young laconically, for he was beginning to feel a little uncertain about it, himself.

The hours dragged on, and at last Lloyd concluded he could ring up the Whitney home.

A maid-servant answered and said that Mr. Whitney never came down stairs before eight o'clock.

"Yes, I know," returned Lloyd, impatiently, for his nerves were getting frazzled. "But I want you to find out if he is awake, and if not, listen and as soon as you hear him stirring, tell him to call me, at my home. Tell him to call the Converse house."

"Yes, sir," was the disinterested reply, and Lloyd went back to his strained attitude of waiting.

Then the servants came. Thorp, the butler, Sarah, the cook, and Maggie, the housemaid.

Young fairly pounced on them, as they came in at exactly seven o'clock.

Surprised and frightened, the women promptly burst into tears, while Thorp presented a white but impassive countenance to his questioners.

"Sit down, Thorp," said Lloyd kindly, as they grouped themselves in the library, which Gray, who appeared at once, chose as the scene of the inquiry.

Thorp sat on the edge of a chair, and Gray spoke with him first.

But the man had little to tell. He said that at about seven o'clock the night before, Mr. George Converse had telephoned up from Long Island, that he was returning unexpectedly that evening, and for Thorp to lay in some food for breakfast and put his bedroom in readiness.

Then on his own, Thorp had telephoned Sarah, and though she didn't come to the house herself, she sent Maggie round to make the bed and arrange the bathroom.

No, Mr. George had not said a word about Mr. Lloyd's coming. No, Thorp knew nothing of any red-haired girl, either belonging above stairs or below.

Maggie, pale and trembling, could tell nothing helpful. She had made up the bed, dusted the rooms and put out soap and towels for Mr. George. She had not been told to fix Mr. Lloyd's rooms, so didn't go up there at all.

She too, knew nothing of any red-haired girl or woman, who might have come to the house.

After further and equally unproductive questioning the servants were told to go and prepare breakfast for all present.

Relieved, but still shattered in nerve, they went away and soon the pleasant odors of coffee and bacon were evident in the atmosphere.

Then the telephone jangled and Lloyd sprang to grasp it, assuming it was Whitney.

He was right, and at his urgent appeal the lawyer agreed to come right over, accepting Lloyd's invitation to breakfast there.

And so, when the meal was announced there were four men to sit at the table, and it was over the coffee cups that Whitney heard the story of George Converse's death.

He listened intently, almost without any word of interruption, but now and then looking questioningly at Lloyd, as if seeking corroboration.

Harrison Whitney was not young, was not even good-looking, but he had a certain something in his presence that invariably commanded attention.

Garrulous as Young was, he paused if Whitney began to speak or even looked as if he meant to.

Of a type that might be called insignificant, the lawyer's face in repose aroused no admiration from an observer, but once he began to speak, it lighted up with the fire of his intellect and if he chose, he held his hearers spellbound.

At mention of the red-haired woman, his interest was caught at once, and he looked up quickly, and said:

"Who is she, Lloyd?"

"I have no idea, Mr. Whitney," the young man returned. "I don't say she was not a friend of my brother's, but if she was, I don't know her and I don't know anything about her."

"Nor I. But, of course, I don't know all the lady friends of my client. One thing, however, is obvious. That woman must be found."

"Mr. Young assures me he will find her." Lloyd said this without malice, but with a slight impulse of satisfaction in seeing Young wriggle.

"Oh, she must be found," the detective said, "of course she must be found."

"You see, Mr. Whitney," Lloyd went on, "these police people think I killed George."

"No, you didn't," Whitney said, quietly, as though he were making an unimportant statement. "For, you had no motive, no opportunity, and beside, you and George were two of the most affectionate brothers I've ever known."

"Pardon me," Young said to the lawyer, using the peculiar intonation that makes that phrase slang, "Mr. Lloyd most assuredly had motive and opportunity, even exclusive opportunity. His brother's death makes him a very rich man, and he was here with his brother a full hour before he called in the police."

"But the escaping woman," Whitney said, in a calm tone, but with challenging eyes.

"We compute the time so that she left the house just before Mr. Lloyd Converse came into it."

"You may be computing erroneously," suggested the lawyer, still smooth of speech.

"We may, but something tells me we're not. Now, of course, Mr. Whitney, you want to do all you can for your client, but you've got to face facts."

"Indeed I shall face facts," the lawyer returned. "But first I must be convinced that they are facts that I'm facing."

Breakfast over, they all went up to the sitting-room where the crime had been committed.

But the body had been removed by the medical examiner's men while the others were at breakfast. The autopsy would shortly be performed, and that afternoon, they were told, by Doctor Jarvis, who had tarried to see them, the inquest would be held.

Doctor Jarvis and Mr. Whitney at once held a long confab, but there was nothing brought out hitherto unknown to the others.

Then the lawyer sat silent as he smoked an after-breakfast cigar.

He could boast what are often termed salient features, in his aquiline nose and prominent, muscular jaw. His eyes were of a steely blue and his forehead showed furrowed lines which seemed to slope up to a point.

His thin lips were pressed tightly together, what

time he held his cigar in his hand, and looking at him thoughtfully, Young concluded that Mr. Lloyd Converse had an able and clever aid in his lawyer.

But, thought Young, if that man gets Lloyd off free, he's got to show us who is the criminal. It's either Lloyd Converse or somebody else. Let old man Whitney show us the somebody else.

This was unnecessarily scathing, for Harrison Whitney was not an old man at all. About forty-two or three, he had worked hard at his chosen profession, and it had aged him in appearance beyond his years. Sometimes he gave way to fits of despondency, almost melancholia, but as a rule, he was vigorous and alert, both physically and mentally.

And now, on his mettle, because of his long-time friendship for the brothers, he thought quickly as to a plan of defense for Lloyd.

Only the red-haired woman could he see at present as a way out.

But he did not harp on it.

"I think," he said, at last, "that when further evidence developes, as it undoubtedly will, there will be no case against my client. But in the meantime, there is nothing for me to do here. I shall, of course, attend the inquest this afternoon, and then I will, perhaps, learn more details, and know better which way to look and what way to take."

"Very well, Mr. Whitney," Gray said, a little

shortly. "I don't mind telling you that we were fully prepared to arrest Mr. Converse, until we heard about the red-haired girl. That, of course, throws a doubt on an otherwise open and shut case. Mr. Converse will, naturally, be kept in sight, but he is free to go where he chooses, so long as he does not leave town. Now, will you give us, Mr. Converse, the address of the place your brother was visiting, on Long Island? Of course, we want to check up."

"Was George down on Long Island?" asked Whitney, seeming interested.

"Yes," Lloyd told him. "I expected to find this house empty."

Then Gray exploded his bomb.

"You expected to find the house empty, Mr. Converse?"

"Yes," replied Lloyd, quietly.

"Then will you explain this telegram, found in your brother's pocket?" and Gray passed over the torn yellow paper.

Whitney leaned over Lloyd's shoulder, and the two men read:

"Dear Brother. I will be at the house late Monday night. Meet me there. Lloyd."

Lloyd stared at it. Then he straightened his square shoulders, looked the Inspector straight in the eyes, and said:

"I never sent that telegram. It is a fake."

" Oh, I guess not," said Young, smiling. " Looks pretty real to me."

" You didn't send that wire, Lloyd? " said the lawyer, looking at the young man.

" No, Mr. Whitney, I did not."

" Then," and Whitney looked grave, " then the red-haired woman sent it, and signed your name."

" That may be," said Lloyd Converse.

CHAPTER IV

THE MIGHTY TRUTH

At WHITNEY's request, Lloyd went with him to his office.

Both men were rather silent on the way, but once there they settled down for a serious conference.

The lawyer's offices, in one of the uptown sky-scrapers, were not of the old-fashioned plush and walnut type.

They were rather plainly furnished, but with good taste and judgment.

The inner sanctum, where he took Converse, was sound proof and was comfortable enough, with easy-chairs and smoking paraphernalia.

"Now," Whitney said, as they lighted cigars, "tell me all about it. No matter if it is repetition, tell me everything that happened last night, after you reached New York City. Of course, boy, I'll look after everything. I'll fix up the necessary details, but from you I want the whole truth. I suppose he attacked you first?"

"Good Heavens, Mr. Whitney!" Lloyd cried out, "you don't think I killed George, do you?"

Lloyd looked so angry, so ferocious even, that the lawyer involuntarily drew back a little, in dismay.

"I haven't said so," he returned, quietly, "but

you'll have to admit that so far, there's no evidence otherwise. Except," he added, grimly, "that red-headed girl. What do you make of her, Converse?"

"I don't know what to make of her." Lloyd spoke impatiently. "And, moreover, I don't propose to make anything. I have no detective talent, and so far as I know, you haven't either. I want you to take the case as my lawyer, and I want your advice and counsel, but when it comes to detective work, I want you to get the best possible talent available, and he will be the one to investigate the girl in question."

"Righto. And don't fly off on a tangent when I ask you questions. For while you tell me you didn't kill George, and while I believe you, yet you did have provocation, and—you had opportunity. What is called exclusive opportunity. I can't ignore these considerations, and so, as I say, you must not get wrathy if I ask questions whose answers are obvious, but necessary."

"Oh, all right,—go ahead. But I hope you'll remember that I resent any implication of guilt in this matter."

"Don't protest too much. Just give me facts and I'll take you at your word in every instance."

"You bet you will! You've known me many years, Mr. Whitney, and you've never known me to lie."

"Cut out the asseverations. You're inexperienced, Lloyd, in legal matters, or you'd know that

such talk won't get you anywhere. Let me have your story of last night's doings, and then we can get together."

Harrison Whitney was always like that.

Hard-headed, cold-blooded, but with a keenness of vision and a talent for going right to the heart of a matter.

In many a criminal case he had "proved" the innocence of a guilty client, because of his reputation for discovering and banking on the truth.

Yet he stood high in his profession and rarely lost a case, never admitting that he swerved in the slightest degree from the straight line of probity and veracity.

"Very well, Mr. Whitney, but I'd like you to quit that tone of conspiracy. As if you were going to get me out of a scrape."

"But you are most certainly in a scrape."

"I know it, but it is a scrape brought about by circumstances, not by my own guilt."

"I agree, but I want you to realize that it's just as hard to get out of,—unless we can find another criminal."

"Another suspect, you mean." Lloyd was short-tempered, and to him, Whitney was decidedly trying.

"Don't quibble. Go ahead with your story."

So the tale was told. Carefully and with meticulous precision, Lloyd went over every minute of the

time from his arrival in New York City, until the appearance of the police at his home.

After he had finished, Whitney gave him a long, keen look.

"I believe you, Converse," he said, with the ring of sincerity in his tone; "but it is only doing my duty to tell you that other people may not be so ready to trust your word. I have known you for years. I know from your past, and from my judgment of character, and from the honor and traditions of your family, that it would be impossible—almost—for you to shoot your own brother, whatever the provocation. So, take it for granted, once and for all, that I am satisfied of your innocence, that I believe your story exactly as you have told it and that I know there must have been some intruder who killed George before you arrived at home.

"But, here is what you have to realize,—that these facts have to be proved. That the police are not going to believe them without proof. That they will not take your word, as I do, and that we must find this other intruder or run the chance of having you definitely suspected, accused—convicted."

Whitney purposely put the case strongly, for he saw the young man's faith in his own innocence was of the sort that resents efforts to prove it. And the lawyer knew that the proof of that innocence was not going to be easy to find.

It was one thing to accuse a problematical,

perhaps mythical red-haired girl, and quite another to find and convict that elusive personage.

It was one thing to win the confidence of a sapient lawyer, who had known his client for many years and another matter to justify that confidence to inexorable law.

But it took a long time to convince Lloyd Converse of these things.

"The truth is mighty and must prevail," he quoted, more than once, until Whitney lost patience.

"Don't say that again," he exclaimed. "It's a fine line for a copy-book, a fine text for a sermon, a great motto for a graduating class. But it isn't worth a last year's dance record when it comes to a criminal case in the courts. And there's no use deceiving you, Lloyd. Your case may come into the courts. I will carry it through, if I can,—you know that,— but we've got to do some hard work first."

"First, last and all the time. I'm not afraid of work. But it's a new one to me, to have to work hard to prove what is God's own truth!"

"God's own truth doesn't always get across in this man-ridden world," the lawyer said, a little wearily.

He was a bit disgusted with what he thought childishness in Lloyd Converse's viewpoint. The older brother, George, had been much more worldly-wise, much more conversant with the wicked ways and means of the men one had to face to-day. This

young fellow was far too guileless to get along, or to get along with.

"And so," Whitney spoke sternly, now, "I tell you, Converse, if you want me to take your case, for you're pretty sure to have one, you'd better leave matters pretty much in my hands. For I tell you, in all honesty and in all kindness, if you carry that attitude of yours around with you, it will get you into trouble."

"What attitude?"

"That 'I am innocent, do your darndest!' air, that you are showing now."

"But it's what I feel."

"I know it," Whitney spoke patiently, "but your feelings, your convictions, your knowledge, all mean nothing and less than nothing to those who suspect you. Proof, man, *proof* is what they want, what they demand, and, what we must give them. And it is proof that means our hard work."

Converse looked at him.

"All right, Mr. Whitney," he said; "after all, I'm nobody's fool. I begin to see what you mean, and I accept your statements. And, too, though I don't often have occasion to demonstrate it, I am a fighter. Now, if, as you say, there's work to be done, I'm your man. If it is necessary to fight for my liberty, I'm ready to do it. But it must be fair fight, —I mean no underhand work, no lying, no perjury or any of that sort of thing."

Harrison Whitney looked at his client with a sort of forced admiration.

"You're out of your setting," he observed. "You belong a few centuries back. Where did you collect all these hifalutin principles, or rather, how have you kept them so intact?"

"Nonsense! As if every decent man wouldn't feel the same way!"

"It's hard for lawyers to understand or appreciate decent men," and Whitney gave an ironic smile. "But I see, Converse, I shall have to save you in spite of yourself, rather than by your assistance. Suppose we let up on this ethical discussion and get busy on our plans. As a starter, do you realize that after the inquest this afternoon, you may find yourself arrested?"

"Not much!" and Lloyd laughed. "They can't arrest a chap for what he didn't do."

"Well, they can," Whitney's tone was crisp, "and they frequently do. But you are hopeless as an assistant, and I must have some help. Now, do you authorize me, as the lawyer in charge of your estate, to engage the services of a first-class detective, or do you want to stand firm on your 'Truth is mighty and must prevail,' pedestal, until they knock you off of it?"

"Don't be peevish!" and Lloyd's frank, boyish smile showed how lightly he was still taking the thought of his own danger. "I do want a detective,

not to get me off scot-free, for that must come of itself. But I want to find out who did kill George, and have him swing for it!"

"That's a little better line of talk. And incidentally, if the detective succeeds in keeping you out of jail, I suppose you won't object."

"The discovery of George's murderer will automatically remove suspicion from me," said Lloyd, with such a sudden change to seriousness, that the lawyer stared at him.

"I'm not the nincumpoop you think me, Mr. Whitney. I admit I have somewhat old-fashioned ideas about the majesty of truth and that sort of thing, but I'm a Twentieth Century product, if you please, and I doubt if you find me altogether moss-bound."

"I didn't mean that, and you know I didn't," the lawyer, returned, quietly; "I only want to impress it upon you, that you are badly handicapped by circumstances, and that it is a case where, if necessary, we must fight fire with fire."

"All right. Light the fuse at once, if it will show up the man who killed old George——"

"Or the woman."

"Yes. I hate to think of George as being mixed up with a woman——well, I suppose that's another of my old-fashioned whims, but I never thought of him that way."

"There are many ways in which you never

thought of George," Whitney said, dryly. "Now don't fly off again, but for the Lord's sake, try to realize that your older brother was not a saint, though he was far from being a devil."

"I will try to realize that," and with one of his sudden serious stares, Lloyd looked into the other's face. "Do you mean by that that George was—— had women friends, not—er—not of his own set?"

"Briefly, Converse, that is just what I mean."

"Let it go at that, then. I accept the fact. Now, may we suspect that the red-haired girl in question was one of these—friends?"

"It seems to me we are forced to suspect that."

"And George had appointed a meeting with her in the house last night?"

"It seems so. As to that telegram,—you didn't send it?"

"I most certainly did not."

"Then, either the girl sent it, signing your name, with the intent of luring George there, or else it was arranged between them that she should use your name as a signature to blind others."

"I see." Lloyd pondered over this. "Well, if the girl killed him, then I think she sent the wire to make him think that I wanted to see him."

"But your thoughts and surmises are not of real value. Please get it into your head that this girl must be discovered, hunted down, run to earth! And that it must be done quickly! And that it requires

trained skill to do it! For us to sit here and wonder and opine and discuss gets us just exactly nowhere."

"I see. Well, then, Mr. Whitney, I authorize you to engage the best detective you know of. Put him on the job as quickly as you can and send the bills to me. I suppose I am George's heir?"

"Yes, of course; all your father's fortune is now yours."

"I'm glad," and Whitney noted curiously Lloyd's air of satisfaction, "because I shall have enough to pay all the detectives necessary, and then some left over. Shan't I?"

"Assuredly, yes. There's a lot of money. Want to go into that now?"

"No, indeed. That will keep. Now as to a detective. I suppose you know a good one?"

"Several. One in especial, I recommend."

"Wait a minute. Do you know whom I'd like to have?"

"No, who?"

"Avery."

"Avery! Do you mean Alan Avery, my head clerk?"

"I do."

"But he isn't a detective."

"Not a professional, but I tell you, Mr. Whitney, he knows a heap about sleuthing. I've known Alan for years and——"

"But I've had him here as a clerk for years, and

if I thought for a moment he could do the necessary work, I'd be only too glad. But he is just a clerk. A plodding, hard-working man. But not one with any training, even if he has detective instinct, which I've no reason to believe."

"No, I suppose he hasn't training or experience. But he has the detective mind, I know. We were together in school——"

"Years ago. Now, Lloyd if you're going to come through this affair at all, you'll have to leave things pretty much to me. You must take my word for matters in which I am better versed than you, for I can tell you, if you don't, you'll be in deep waters that even I can't drag you out of."

Whitney spoke very gravely, and Converse gave in at once.

"All right," he agreed. "As I have said, I'll do whatever you say. But let Avery in on it, and I'll bet you find him a help."

"Avery is in on all my cases. He's my right-hand man, and he knows all there is to know about my business. But never have I thought of him as a detective, and I'm sure he never fancied himself in that rôle."

"Well, Mr. Whitney, get your detective,—can you call him up now? And I'd like a talk with Avery. I haven't seen him all summer."

"I'll have him in. Yes, I can probably get

Kittinger on the wire. He's the detective I have in mind for first choice."

While the lawyer proceeded to get in touch with the detective, Alan Avery appeared.

He was friendly with Lloyd Converse, though since their school days the two met only occasionally.

"Hello, old chap," said Lloyd, cordially, but Avery's greeting was more restrained.

Pleasant enough, he was, but formal in manner, and scant of speech.

"I thought you'd do for a detective," Lloyd began. "You know all about George, don't you?"

"I know a little," Avery returned, seeming to speak with caution.

He was a round-headed, round-bodied young man, with pop eyes that protruded so far, one felt that if he leaned forward they'd surely drop out.

These eyes were round and black and shiny and in addition to their forward prominence, they darted sideways and also rolled around with a revolving motion that was as fascinating as it was annoying.

Avery's hair was black and shiny also, and he wore a small mustache to match.

His skin was a warmish olive and his lips were red; and altogether he seemed possessed of great and intense vitality, with untold stores of nervous energy and efficiency.

Whitney had said of him once that he looked like a safe repository of dire and tremendous secrets.

"But," he had added, "while the repository would be safe enough, the secrets aren't there."

"Come out to lunch with me," said Lloyd, impulsively, "and I'll tell you all. Mr. Whitney is going to get a real detective, but maybe you and I can do a little on our own."

Avery looked at his chief inquiringly.

"I'm getting Kittinger," Whitney informed. "He'll be over in a few moments. Of course, you must stay and see him, Lloyd. Avery, you stick around, and pick up what you can. Heaven knows, if you can help we'll all be glad, but I never picked you up for a detective."

"And I'm not one," said Avery, in his matter-of-fact way. "But of course, I'm terribly interested in the death of George Converse, and I'll help if I can."

Kittinger came then, and soon the four were in earnest confab.

The detective's appearance called forth unqualified praise from Lloyd.

"I'm glad to see you look exactly as a detective is supposed to look," he said, with his winning smile, when they were introduced. "You know, all the story books start in by saying that the detective looks absolutely unlike a detective. I don't know why the authors think it necessary, but I've never read one that didn't observe, 'anyone less like a detec-

tive could scarcely be imagined.' Now you, Mr. Kittinger, might be Sherlock, his very self."

"Yes?" said Kittinger, polite but uninterested. "I hope I can achieve a Sherlockian success in this instance. There's not much time, Mr. Whitney."

"I know it, Kit, and so I propose that Mr. Converse tell you his story as briefly as he can, and then you can go over to the house if you wish."

So, once again, Lloyd went over the tale of the night before.

The detective and Alan Avery as well, listened carefully, while Whitney who had heard it before, turned his attention to some newly arrived mail.

The straightforward and earnest manner of the narrator carried its own weight, and the saturnine countenance of Dan Kittinger softened to an understanding pity as he realized what the young man was so unconsciously up against.

"Of course," he said, as the tale closed, "the most interesting point, so far, is that wet footprint. You're sure it was wet, Mr. Converse?"

"Sure," replied Lloyd, without further insistence.

"A bizarre clue like that ought to be of great help," Kittinger went on. "Even if planted there with a misleading purpose, it is highly indicative."

"Indicative of what?" asked Whitney, looking up.

"Indicative of what Kipling might call, a man of infinite resource and sagacity," Kittinger smiled.

"And, on the other hand, if it was not planted, it is so strange as to promise interesting evidence if read aright."

"It was wet," Lloyd reiterated, "that is, not sopping wet, but damp."

"Can't judge time by it," Kittinger declared. "No amount of tests would help that way. For a very wet foot would leave a print that would last a long time, while if one shakes his wet foot before setting it down, the print would dry in a few minutes."

"You were a cute one to get the outline, Converse," Avery said, the round marbles of his eyes staring his admiration.

"It seemed the right thing to do," Lloyd returned. "I tried to find other clues, but, it seems I made them instead. Fingerprints here and there, you know and all that."

"Let's go up to your house, Mr. Converse," the detective suggested. "If I'm to work on this case, I'd like to go over the ground before the place is any further mussed up."

"I'd like to go along, Mr. Whitney," Avery said, to his employer.

"Go ahead, Alan," Whitney told him. "Then I needn't go, and I've some important matters to look into here. So, go, my budding Sherlock, and glean what you can."

Kittinger's car was waiting and the three went to the Converse house.

The body of the dead man had been taken away and they went at once to George's sitting-room, where the crime had, apparently, taken place.

Kittinger ran true to form.

He scrutinized every piece of furniture the room contained. Then he went nosing about, poking behind window draperies and into desk drawers.

Alan Avery did no sleuthing, but instead, he closely watched Kittinger.

It seemed to Avery that the detective was doing two things at once. One, putting up a sort of bluff or masquerade search and the other, a still hunt of his own.

For much of the ostensible peering about was purely perfunctory and resulted in nothing. While the more earnest zest shown when the investigator delved into dark corners was clearly intentional, and brought forth its result as Kittinger picked up from the floor, behind a sofa, two beads, of varying sizes, both of a bright blue color.

"The red-haired girl!" cried Lloyd, while the stolid officer, who had been left in charge of the room, stared in amazement.

He also looked at the detective suspiciously, as if inclined to think he had brought the beads with him.

"Nice clues," remarked Kittinger, in a purring way, as he gently patted the blue beads. "See any more, anybody?"

But nobody did, and the little group moved on into the bathroom.

Here the detective's hawk-like eyes roved quickly about, but apparently found nothing of interest.

And then, casually opening the clothes hamper, he found therein only a dry wad of linen, which he brought out to view.

"I put that there," Lloyd exclaimed. "I forgot all about it! You see, it was on the washstand when I came in. It was wet then."

Kittinger touched the bunch of cloth almost reverently.

"And it's dry now," he said. "And with any luck, it's a fine fist print of the murderer himself."

"What! You can't get fingerprints from linen cloth!" cried Lloyd.

"Not finger prints in the usually accepted sense of that term. But, see, it retains the impress of the fingers that squeezed it out. That may or may not show us the owner of those fingers. As you see, it was squeezed by a strong, firm hand that grasped the wet cloth with vigor and squeezed hard. Don't touch it, for Heaven's sake! I scarcely know how to preserve it. For Lord knows when we shall need it."

And then, glancing about, the detective noticed the small wall cupboard with its key. Into that he slipped the precious bit of linen, and locked it away, putting the key in his own pocket.

CHAPTER V

ENTER JANET

"LADY on the telephone for you, sir," Thorp said to Lloyd.

The servants had been instructed to go about their duties as usual, except that none was to enter the rooms of George's suite.

Lloyd ran upstairs to take the message on his own extension instrument, and was thrilled with a sudden delight as he heard the voice of the girl he loved.

"It's me,—Janet," she informed him. "Why haven't you been to see me or called me up, Mr. Badman?"

"I'm not sure you want to see me," Lloyd replied, gravely. "You know of our—our tragedy here?"

"Yes, of course. And, so, of course I want to see you. I can't talk over the wire."

"No. But do you know, Janet, that I'm—I'm by way of being suspected of—of guilt——."

"Oh, Lloyd, do hush! Come over here, right now,—can't you?"

"I can and I will," and hanging up the receiver, he raced downstairs and reported to the detective.

"Mr. Kittinger," he began, "I suppose I'm under

surveillance, or something of that sort, but would there be any objection to my going out to see a—a friend of mine? A lady,—only a few blocks away."

"No," Kittinger returned, quietly, "but if I were you, I'd go at once, and make no fuss about it."

Lloyd caught on, and went quietly downstairs and out the front door, taking his hat from the hall rack as he passed.

He walked the few blocks, his mind in a wild turmoil.

He had a strange undercurrent of thought that he was not grieving sufficiently for George,—poor old George,—they had always been such pals.

Then he felt remorse that he had, in his heart, accused George of meanness, that he had intended to tell him so, and ask for a larger allowance.

This was only justice, he knew, but now that George was dead, things looked different.

Who had killed him? Who in the world could have killed him?

And then the realization flashed back into his mind that some people thought he had! That he had killed his brother!

It would be almost laughable, were it not so monstrous.

Why, he and George had always loved each other, —yes, even though their ways and their tastes were different, they had always had a deep, underlying affection, such as became brothers.

Well, a suspicion of that sort was too ridiculous, too absurd for him to bother about.

But would it affect Janet's feelings toward him? Ah, there was the rub.

He wished now, as he had wished many times while away in the mountains, that he had fixed things up with her before he went away.

If they were engaged, he could go to her and tell her of his innocence and beg her to believe in him.

But could he go there and ask her to marry him, while this sword hung above his head?

Dare he avow his love, when to-morrow he might find himself under arrest?

His problems still unsolved, he reached the tall apartment house on upper Fifth Avenue where Janet Thurston lived.

Shaking his broad shoulders, as if to shake off troublesome thoughts, he rang the bell.

Once in the familiar living-room, his mind seemed to fly back to the springtime, when he had last been there.

To the evening when he had hinted at his love for her, had suggested an engagement, and she had laughed at him, and told him to go away and spend the summer thinking it over.

He had obeyed almost literally, and now, sure of his love for her, he had returned, hoping she would be sure of her love for him.

Lloyd was none of your impulsive, impetuous wooers, but his big, deep, heart and his strong, steadfast affection was worthy the acceptance of any girl, was far more dependable and lasting than many an impulse of love at first sight.

If, as is said, opposites should mate, then his nature was well fitted to attract Janet Thurston.

She came flying into the room, a slight, lithe figure, with a small, black, bobbed head, and large, dancing black eyes.

"Lloyd!" she cried, "you angel child! Why didn't you come to me at once? Why wait for me to hammer at you on the telephone?"

"I wasn't sure you wanted——"

"Nonsense! Of course I wanted! You know I did! Well, where are we at? Did you think it over during the summer? Did you conclude I'm the only girl in the world for you? And that you love me more than life itself? And that you can't live without me?"

Lloyd woke up.

"Yes," he said, almost snatching her slender body into his big embrace. "Yes, Janet, all that, and more. You blessing! You sweet, sweet thing!"

He covered the smiling little face with kisses, and then, picked her up bodily and plumped her down on a sofa and sat beside her.

"But all that, kiddy, must wait," he said, once again the serious, perplexed man of affairs. "I'm

caught in rather a strange trap, dear, which may mean desperate trouble or may not. But, in a word, I'm suspected of shooting George."

"Yes, you would be." The sleek little black head nodded sapiently.

"What do you mean by that?" Lloyd stared at her.

"Only that, having no other suspect, the police naturally cast you for that part."

"How do you know there's no other? How do you know anything about it anyway? And what do you know?"

The big black eyes became soft and sympathetic as she said, slowly:

"I know you didn't kill your brother. I know there is no sign of the one who did do it. I know you are suspected, and that unless someone else is found to accuse, you are in desperate case."

"All true, dear. Now, how did you learn all this?"

"Lady Gay is one of Mr. Whitney's clients, you know. She had to see him this morning on business, and he told her."

"I see. And Whitney represented it as bad as that?"

"I'm not sure that he did, but he told Lady Gay the facts, and I pieced out the rest. Now, Lloyd, what are we going to do?"

"We?"

"Surely we. You are in this thing up to the neck, so, of course I am, too. And I propose to help, not merely to stand by and say, oh my! oh, my! But just what we're going to do, I don't know. Do you?"

"No, Jannie, dear, I don't. But I doubt we can do anything definite. You see, Whitney has already engaged a detective, one of the best—"

"Will the police let him do that?"

"Oh, yes; any citizen may engage a private detective. Also, I have a fancy for a clerk of Mr. Whitney's in this rôle. To my mind, Alan Avery has all the powers of a detective, though without technical training. However, if he and the real detective can't prove my innocence, then——"

"Then what, Lloyd?"

"I don't know, Janet," he said, very soberly.

A sound in the hall was followed by a breezy entrance and a high-pitched voice called out.

"Hello, Lloyd!"

"Ah, Lady Gay," he exclaimed, and rose to greet the newcomer.

A woman who was forty and looked thirty came toward him. She was so well groomed and so well dressed that she would have commanded attention anywhere.

Moreover, her manner was full of charm, her smile was merry and her blue eyes fairly shone a welcome.

Gabrielle Vincent, a divorcée, was the apparently irresponsible but really capable guardian of Janet, and though the two were more like sisters, there was a firm hand in the velvet glove of Lady Gay.

Gabrielle had been an intimate friend of Janet's mother, and when the girl was left an orphan, it was with an arrangement that Mrs. Vincent should take charge of her, and in return would share Janet's home.

The plan worked out rather better than might have been expected, for both parties were ready and willing to coöperate, and the little home they made for themselves was delightful and its hospitality much sought after.

Lloyd Converse had been a frequent visitor there for a year or more, but George was little known to them, save as the name of Lloyd's older brother.

Mrs. Vincent, therefore, who was straightforward in her ways, said, at once:

"We are so sorry for you, Lloyd, dear. But, as you know, we knew your brother only slightly, and now, while we have all sympathy for your loss, we are more deeply interested in your own welfare."

"I know, Lady Gay," and Lloyd understandingly accepted her attitude, "Janet tells me you have seen Mr. Whitney this morning, and he thinks things look rather—er—dark. I knew he thought that, though he didn't put it that way to me. But his get-

ting a detective in such a hurry, of course meant possible trouble ahead."

"Yes," was the somewhat abrupt reply, "but, luncheon is about ready. You stay with us, Lloyd, and if they need you over home, they can send for you. I see you and Janet have fixed things up,—not that there was much fixing necessary!"

Lady Gay was possessed of keen intuition, but it was not greatly needed to see how matters stood between the two young people.

Lloyd's air of ownership was unmistakable, as was also Janet's little smile of content.

"There is fixing necessary," Lloyd said, in his serious way, "but it must wait till this horrid business is over. I love Janet and I want her, as you both know, but I will not link her life with mine by any promise or plight until I am freed from this ridiculous, this abominable accusation. You never knew George well, Lady Gay, but you did know my attitude toward him. You did know of my affection for him."

"Yes, Lloyd," she interrupted, "all that, of course. But the thing is to find the real murderer. Oh, I know all the main details, I got it all from Mr. Whitney, and I'm sure he can get you off—even if worse comes to worst."

Lloyd Converse went pale.

"If I am—tried, you mean?" he said, in an awed tone.

"Yes, just that. You must realize,—it is better that you should realize, but, never mind, now. Come to luncheon, both of you."

And throughout the mea', Lady Gay would not allow one word of the awful subject that was in all their minds.

She chatted about many things, asked Lloyd about his summer doings, told of their own, and so skilfully did she keep the conversational ball rolling that her guest showed a normal appetite, much to the satisfaction of his clever hostess.

Nor was Janet lacking in tactful helpfulness.

She was merry and gentle by turns, but never gave hint of the fear that was gnawing at her very soul.

Her meeting with Lloyd and her immediate assumption of their engagement was all based on the facts that she knew he loved her, that she knew he would hesitate to tell her so because of the tragedy in his home and that the matter must be settled if she was to help him in this awful crisis.

And though she and Gabrielle Vincent did not know George Converse well at all, yet they did know the conditions of the Converse fortune, and of the unjust dependence of Lloyd on his brother for income.

Lloyd had a business of his own, he was a rather promising architect, but until he built up a reputation,

a further share of his father's money would be very welcome.

It was no secret. Almost everyone who knew Lloyd knew that he was dependent on George's whim for the amount of his spending money. And knew, too that George was by no means liberal-minded.

This did not argue to Lloyd's friends that he had killed his brother, but it did to the police and to many acquaintances who knew him only slightly.

So there the matter stood, and though ever so unjustly suspected, Lloyd Converse could see no wire to pull, no log to roll, nothing to do but to stand firmly on his own assertion of innocence, which, he at last began to feel, was a very wobbly platform.

The pleasant friendliness of the two women, the physical support of the good luncheon, and the general atmosphere of peace and safety all tended to raise his spirits, and it was with a decided jolt back to realities that he heard he was summoned by telephone to return home at once.

"Well, it must be gone through with," he said, looking very big and powerful as he took his leave. "The inquest will be this afternoon,—I suppose that's what I'm wanted for. I hope there will be an open verdict, but if not—well, don't worry, Janet, dear. In any case,——"

"In any case, I'll see you again soon," the girl said, smiling at him. "Run along, now,— don't get in bad by being late!"

She kissed him lightly on the cheek and pushed him out at the door.

Returning, she said:

"Looks bad, Lady Gay."

"Very bad, dear. There is so little to work on. The brothers were there. George is dead. Lloyd is accused."

"Oh, Heavens! Don't put it so frightfully definite."

"Get on your things, Janet, we're going to the inquest."

"Of course," and the girl went for her hat.

"What do you mean by getting out of the way like that?" asked Whitney testily, as Lloyd came back to his home.

"I left word where to find me," was the reply, "there was nothing I could do here."

"I suppose not," the lawyer spoke more gently, "but, I tell you Lloyd, you're in a ragged position. And anything you do that looks independent or indicates a spirit of bravado, militates against you. You must be careful of appearances. Oh, I know your nature is all for straightforwardness, and plain dealing. But you never were up against a proposition of this sort before. Remember that your own knowledge of your innocence doesn't cut any ice with your accusers. Remember that if you can conciliate them in any way, in the least degree, you must do so. Please try to look at it from this point of view. If

you don't, if you persist in your cocksure, devil-may-care attitude, then on your own head be the consequences. I can't help you."

Converse looked thoughtful.

"Just what do you want me to do, Mr. Whitney?" he asked. "I don't want to be a pig-headed fool."

"No, I'm sure you don't, my boy. Well, there's nothing definite for you to do. But don't seem oblivious to the situation. Don't go gallivanting to the neighbors when it's nearly time for the inquest to begin. Don't be difficult of access when the police want to question you. Don't be out of the way when our detective wants your assistance."

"Then, I gather, my misdemeanor was in going over to see Janet Thurston just now."

"That, but more especially that you stayed there so long."

"I had to lunch somewhere."

"You could have lunched here at home. Your servants prepared an excellent meal for all who chose to avail themselves of it."

"Well, I like to pick my company. And Janet and Lady Gay were far more entertaining than a lot of policemen and detectives."

"You are incorrigible, Lloyd. You're more like a mischievous schoolboy than a responsible man."

"No, Mr. Whitney," Lloyd turned serious. "I am a responsible man, right enough. But I am not

responsible for my brother's death, and I'm going to prove it."

"That's better talk," and Whitney nodded his head. "Now, listen. At the inquest, they will put all sorts of questions to you, in the hope of making you contradict yourself. Be guarded in your replies."

"Don't have to. When one is telling the truth, one doesn't have to watch his step as if he were lying."

Whitney groaned.

"Listen, Lloyd," he said, sternly. "You may be telling the truth, God knows,—I don't. But do try to understand that there is somebody out against you. You say you didn't send that telegram to your brother."

"I did not!"

"Well, it was sent, wasn't it? Then somebody, presumably the murderer, sent it with the intent of incriminating you. Now, your denial will have little weight if you merely say flippantly, 'Oh, no, I never sent that.' You must tell them earnestly, emphatically that you didn't send it, that you couldn't have sent it, that you believe it was sent as a plant."

"Oh," and Lloyd looked surprised, "I thought you would do all that. You and Mr. Kittinger."

"We will do all we can, of course, but you must be with us, you must assist us, and not make our efforts futile by your own seeming indifference. Your principle of 'truth is mighty and must prevail' won't get you anywhere, unless you are prepared to

bolster up that truth, to prop it and stay it and insist on it until it does prevail. Can't you see this?"

"I suppose you are right. I know you are right. But it is a new idea to me."

"Get accustomed to it quickly then, for you're going to need it very soon. And here's another thing. I suppose you didn't know about George's—er—lady friends?"

"Meaning disreputable women, I assume. No, I didn't, and if anybody but you referred to such a subject I'd knock him down!"

"Never mind the heroics. And just accept the fact that there were such people in your brother's life. Few men are entirely free. Anyway, I found several notes and some photographs in a secret drawer in George's desk. I want you to know this, for they may have to be used as evidence."

"No! I'd rather——"

"Hold hard. Don't say you'd rather be accused of your brother's death than to have it made public that he now and then indulged in a questionable friendship."

"No—I can't quite say that, for I didn't kill him, and I don't want to be accused of it. But, can't the women be overlooked?"

"Most of them, perhaps, but there's the red-headed girl. What of her?"

"Did you find any photograph or letters of hers?"

"My dear boy, how can I tell? How can anyone tell? Photographs don't show the color of a woman's hair, and the notes are mostly mere dates or appointments and often unsigned."

"Then why lug in the business as evidence?"

"To prove that George had these friends, and that, coupled with the story of the red-haired girl, there's a way to look for a murderer, besides yourself."

"I see," and Lloyd was very grave. "Well, Mr. Whitney, since I saw you first this morning, I've an additional reason for wanting to be freed of this miserable mistake. I am, or I shall be, if I'm freed, engaged to Janet Thurston. I can't offer her a soiled name."

"You can't offer her any name unless you rise to the occasion better than you have been doing. I'm glad she's in it, for that may make you realize how much this whole thing depends on yourself. While Kittinger will do all he can, while I shall do all I can, the verdict of the Coroner's jury this afternoon, will largely depend on your attitude and your manner of self-exoneration."

"Have the jury no sense of justice?"

"They may think they have, but few laymen even know what justice means. The jury are human, more so than some other bodies of men! They are greatly influenced by the looks, the manner and the words of the suspect. If you can convince them of

your innocence that is all that is necessary. But you won't convince them by a haughty independence or by a scornful indifference."

"And I must curry favor with a dozen morons, who don't know right from wrong?"

"There you go again! Morons! If that is how you think of them, for the Lord's sake, keep it to yourself. It is that spirit, that attitude that will be your undoing. Oh, Lloyd, you are positively hopeless!"

"All right, Mr. Whitney, I think I see what you mean. And I shall certainly try to cultivate the right demeanor. I will not be uppish and all that. I will try to achieve the right mean between dignity and courtesy. I will do all I can to meet their approval, while preserving my own self-respect."

"Your self-respect won't do you much good when you find yourself in a cell."

"No, I daresay not. And I begin to think I can't keep out of that cell. Mr. Whitney, who killed my brother?"

"That red-headed woman, beyond all doubt. But she is so wrapped in mystery, so difficult, so impossible to trace, that the men you rightly dub morons, will grasp at you as the only available substitute for her. They would gladly accept her as the criminal if they could get hold of her. But 'any port in a storm' is often their motto, and if they feel that

you are in any way a good one to take it out on, you for their verdict! Get me?"

"I'm beginning to. And Mr. Whitney, when I do sense a thing, I sense it pretty thoroughly."

"Well, sense this, then. Everybody concerned will do all he can for you, but the principal part in this drama must be taken by yourself. If the jury are to look on you leniently, if they are to believe your story, you must tell it convincingly,—more, you must make them believe it is not only true, but that nothing else can be true. It is a psychological situation, in a way. You must almost hypnotize those men into believing you."

"You're making it too hard, Mr. Whitney. I doubt I can accomplish all that."

"Then where does your mighty truth land you? If it is to prevail, it will be because of your sincerity, your unmistakable veracity. You must put it over, Lloyd, it all depends on that."

"I'll do my best," said Lloyd Converse.

CHAPTER VI

THE VERDICT

THE Coroner's jury did not number twelve good men and true, but only half a dozen, gathered in, for the most part unwillingly, from the neighborhood.

As to their goodness and truth, they were probably about the average and their most salient characteristic seemed to be a mild curiosity.

For the Converse brothers were known as two rich and important men about town, and for one to be suspected of shooting the other was at least, a sensational affair.

The medical examiner, Doctor Jarvis, conducted the examination and following a time-honored precedent, began with the house servants.

Thorp retold his story as he had given it to them in the morning.

"You had a telephone message from Mr. George Converse?"

"Yes, sir, about seven o'clock."

"What did he say?"

"Only that he would come home late at night, and I was to have his rooms ready for him, and some food in the house for breakfast."

"How could you buy food at that hour?"

"I live several blocks over East, and there are some shops over there that are open evenings. I

bought the few things necessary over there and brought them here with me."

"What time were you here?"

"About eight. I opened up some windows and laid a fire ready to light in Mr. George's sitting-room. Then I telephoned to Sarah the cook, and she sent Maggie, the housemaid, who is her daughter, round to make the bed and put the bath towels out."

"What else did you do?"

"Not much else, sir. The house was clean, and there wasn't much to be done. I didn't take the linen slip-covers off the furniture, for I didn't know if Mr. George meant to stay home or not."

"You didn't wait till Mr. Converse arrived?"

"Oh, no sir. He said he wouldn't get home till nearly midnight. So, after Maggie came and did up her work, we went away together."

"What time was that?"

"About nine or shortly after. I didn't notice exactly."

"You saw nothing unusual about the house?"

"Nothing at all, sir. It was just as I left it the last time I was here."

"When was that?"

"About three days ago, sir. We're only required to come twice a week during the summer, while the gentlemen are away in the country."

"Now this telephone from Mr. George Converse. Where was he?"

"At a country house down on Long Island, sir. Mr. Merridew's home, at Glen Cove."

"Mr. George didn't tell you why he was coming home so unexpectedly?"

"No, sir. He just told me to get the house in shape."

"I see. That will do, Thorp. Young, will you call up the Merridew house, and learn anything you can as to Mr. Converse's reasons for coming up to New York late last night?"

Young departed on his errand, and Jarvis called Maggie next.

The girl was composed enough now. She corroborated all Thorp had said. She testified that she had done nothing in the house save to dust Mr. George's rooms and arrange the bathroom for his convenience.

"Did you go upstairs to Mr. Lloyd Converse's rooms at all?"

"No, sir," and Maggie looked a little scared.

"Why not?"

"Why, sir, we had no orders from Mr. Lloyd. We fixed Mr. George's rooms and then we went home."

"You live near Thorp?"

"The next block, sir. He took me home before he went home himself."

"What time did you get home?"

"It was nearly half past nine, I remember, be-

cause it was too late, mother said, for me to go to the movies."

"You noticed nothing unusual in the bathroom? No footprint on the mat?"

Maggie looked blank.

"Footprints on the mat? The bath mat? Why, I laid that out myself, sir. A clean one from the linen closet. Of course there were no footprints on it."

"No, of course not. What else did you put out?"

"Towels and washcloths and Mr. George's sponge and soap,—Bouquet soap, the kind he likes. We keep all these things put away in summer, 'cause they'd get so dusty."

"Yes; I see you're a good housekeeper, Maggie. And as you dusted Mr. George's sitting-room, did you notice any papers, or any letters on his desk?"

"No, sir, there wasn't any. He never left such things out when he was away."

"And you swept?"

"No, sir, I didn't sweep. The rooms had all been lately cleaned. I brushed around the hearth a bit, and dusted the furniture."

"Did you look about the floor?"

"Look about the floor?" the girl stared blankly.

"Yes. If there had been anything unusual on the floor, would you have seen it?"

"Why, I don't know. If it had been in the middle of the floor, now—such as what, sir?"

"Such as these beads," and Jarvis showed her the two blue beads that Kittinger had found and had turned over to him.

"No, sir, I didn't see any beads on the floor, but they could have been there, sir, if they had been behind a big chair, or the sofa. I didn't move the heavy furniture about at all."

Maggie looked at the beads with interest, but with no sign of having seen them before.

"What do you know of Mr. George Converse's friends,—ladies, I mean."

Maggie blushed a little, but answered, readily enough:

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Nothing? Surely you must have seen one here with him at times?"

"Never sir. Nobody ever came when I was about."

"Well, then have you ever seen any evidence that any one had been here?"

She blushed still more deeply.

"Maybe, sir," she said.

"Out with it. Tell anything you may know."

"I don't know anything. Only sometimes when I clean up of a morning, I see traces of powder, or maybe a lace handkerchief that makes me think a

lady might have been here, sir. But mostly, Mr. George had menfolks to see him."

"Yes. Now, do you think there was a lady here last night?"

"I don't see any reason to think so, sir, unless it might be those beads."

"Why would a lady visitor leave two beads?"

"Why it would have to be that the string broke —they're always a breakin', and the beads scattered about, and she picked 'em all up, 'ceptin' two."

Maggie's imagination was vivid, and she seemed to see the distressed lady scrambling for her beads.

"It might be. Now, do you know of any lady who ever visited Mr. George, who had red hair?"

"No, sir, that I don't. But I never saw any lady here at all."

"No. That is all, Maggie, for the present. Well, Young, what's the word?"

The police detective answered at length.

"I got Mr. Merridew himself on the wire. He says that Mr. George Converse expected to stay with him a few days longer, but that yesterday afternoon, about five o'clock, he received a telegram, and after reading it, said at once that he should have to go up to New York right after dinner, last night. He gave no further information as to what the telegram was about or whom it was from. Mr. Merridew naturally inferred it was a business matter, or at least a private affair, and asked no questions. He says Mr.

Converse left his house about ten o'clock, he thinks, and came to New York in the train. He says Mr. Converse seemed in no way worried or alarmed, but merely said he had to leave, and left."

"That settles the telegram then. I think you must have sent it, Mr. Converse, since it has been found in your brother's pocket, and signed with your name."

"I couldn't have sent it," Lloyd exclaimed, indignantly. "I was on my way home from the Adirondacks. I was in the train!"

"Telegrams can be sent from a train or from a way station," Jarvis said, suavely. "The top of this message is torn off,——"

"Yes," Lloyd fairly shouted, "and that proves it is not from me! It was sent by some one else,—it is a plant."

"Be a little more quiet, if you please," Jarvis admonished, and Whitney shot a warning glance at his hot-tempered client.

The detective Kittinger, said no word but listened intently to all the proceedings. Alan Avery, too, was deeply interested.

The men of the jury listened perfunctorily, only rousing to especial attention when Lloyd's eager expostulation brought reproof down on his head.

"It is not impossible that the telegram may be a forgery," Jarvis said, judicially, "but we have nothing to indicate that. The fact that the top half of

the paper is torn off, means nothing. Men frequently keep only the actual message and signature of a telegram. Now, if you please, Mr. Converse. I'd like to ask you a few questions. How did you happen to come home from your vacation last night?"

"I didn't happen to, at all. The time I had set for my trip to the Adirondacks was about up, so I came home."

"You were not expected here."

"I know it. I knew the house was to be opened for my brother and myself next week. But I wanted to get back to town and I was willing to live for a few days in the house by myself, or, if I chose I could call the servants in. Anyway, I could shift for myself for one night or so, and I came along without much thought as to my not being expected."

"You knew your brother was down on Long Island?"

"Certainly. While not much given to correspondence, we always keep in touch with one another during our long absences."

"He, then, expected you home next week?"

"Yes, or the latter part of this week."

"To-day is Tuesday. How did you happen to return last night?"

"Oh,—er—merely a whim. I was fed up with the woods and wanted to get back to town."

Mrs. Vincent and Janet Thurston sat quietly

listening to all this, but though apparently at ease, their hearts were in a turmoil.

Doctor Jarvis was so evidently master of the situation, he seemed so satisfied with the way things were going, Lloyd was so obviously careless in his speech,—it was all dangerous and alarming.

Lady Gay glanced at Lawyer Whitney imploringly, only to receive in return a shrug of the shoulders and a shake of the head that seemed to signify utter helplessness on the part of the legal adviser.

"I see. And you wanted especially to see your brother?"

"Yes, I did," and Lloyd looked up in surprise at the questioner's perspicacity.

"What about?"

"A private matter between us."

"A financial question?"

"Yes," Lloyd's frankness was incorrigible.

"You wanted to ask him to increase your allowance——"

"I say, Doctor Jarvis," Whitney's cool voice broke in, "aren't you getting too personal in your suggestions to my client?"

"It is necessary, Mr. Whitney, if we would get at the truth of this thing."

"Truth!" exclaimed Lloyd, incensed afresh. "You'll never get at the truth this way. I did want to see my brother, I did expect to ask him to increase my share of my father's money, but I didn't kill

him! I didn't see him alive at all! He was dead when I got here. Killed by somebody, who is now trying to fasten the crime on me. And that effort, aided by circumstances is blinding you, Doctor Jarvis and you, gentlemen of the jury to the truth!"

"Please, Mr. Converse, be good enough to answer questions, and not make observations. Tell of your arrival here at this house last night."

"Why tell the truth when you won't believe it? I reached New York soon after midnight, and stopped in the restaurant of the Grand Central Station to get some supper, knowing this house was closed. Then I took a taxicab home, you can doubtless find that driver, and I got here, I think, about one o'clock. I don't know the exact time. I had my own latch-key, of course, and I came in and stopped first in the library downstairs."

"What for?"

"For no particular reason. But it is natural when entering an empty house to look about a bit. I pushed on the light but as there was nothing wrong that I could see, I turned it off again, and started upstairs. I intended to go straight to my own rooms, on the third floor, and tumble into bed."

"Your bed was not made up."

"I am a camper, and I am not dependent on servants for my accommodations. I could quite easily make up a bed for myself, and do all that was necessary for my own personal comfort. But as I

came upstairs, I noticed a streak of light under the door of my brother's bedroom. I was surprised, but at once assumed that he was at home, after all. So I opened the door, and then discovered that the light came from the bathroom. So, naturally, I went in, and going through to my brothers sitting-room, I found the dead body there."

The very earnestness of Lloyd's tone, the very simplicity of his manner carried conviction to those who heard him without prejudice.

But some of the jury were only too ready to believe the worst of their suspect, and they determinedly thrust aside their wavering inclinations to accept his story, and impatiently demanded further revelation.

Questioned by Doctor Jarvis, Lloyd detailed the finding of the wet footprint on the mat in the bathroom, and told of drawing the outline in hope of thus providing a possible clue.

One of the jury openly scoffed at this.

"I can't swallow that footprint," he said, with a ponderous smile. "I can't see a murderer undressing and taking a tub before leaving the scene of his crime. I should think he'd light out as quickly as possible."

"I'm telling you facts," Lloyd glowered at him. "You can swallow such as you choose and leave the rest alone. But that doesn't alter the facts. That

footprint was wet when I went into that bathroom. I drew the outline to preserve it, as I knew it must soon dry. Would I have done such a fool thing if it had been my own footprint?"

"Yes, if you had put it there inadvertently, and wished to disguise it, by drawing a wrong outline."

"You are ingenious enough to be a murderer yourself," cried Lloyd, in admiration, and the juror looked highly incensed.

Janet cast a beseeching glance at Lloyd, but that intrepid youth did not see it.

Doctor Jarvis went on. He made Lloyd tell of picking up the revolver and of, later, putting it back where he had found it. He made him tell of taking two drinks of whisky from the bottle on the table, and of hanging up the towels which he picked up from the bathroom floor.

Whether it was the adroit way in which Jarvis brought these things out, or the resentful way in which Lloyd recounted them, the effect on the jury was disastrous to the cause of the suspected man.

Harrison Whitney shook his head and looked grave.

Alan Avery listened and bit his lip in impotent dismay.

Kittinger, the detective, betrayed no uneasiness, but in his heart he began to feel that he was championing a cause already lost.

The policeman, Binns, was brought in. He was not on duty now, and had been summoned from his home.

Jarvis requested him to tell, with careful detail, the story he had already given them of the red-haired girl.

But the man seemed to have forgotten much of it, and it needed several prods to get his memory in working order.

"Why, yes, sir, I recollect o' seein' that girl, but I can't tell you much about her. She was a gay piece,—I sorta gathered that."

"Tall?"

"Mejum tall. Mejum stout. Not a flapper piece, but older like,—yet giddy, too."

"How did you gather all this when, as you say, you only saw her dimly and you scarcely remember her?"

"Oh, I remember her good enough,—only, I'm kinder afraid I'll say somethin' that aint so,—not quite right, you know."

"Well, go ahead, describe her as you remember her."

"Well, she came outa the house a bit scared like, —lookin' about as if to see if anybody was a watchin'."

"Yes. Go on."

"Yes sir. Then, as she see me a lookin' at her,

she changed like, got sorter sassy actin' and began fixin' her face."

"In the dark?"

"Well, the street was half-way light,—enough for her, I s'pose. Anyway, that's what she done, only, between you and me, sir, I suspicioned that she fussed with that what-you-call-em,—vanity box, more to keep my peepers off her, than for any other reasons."

"You think perhaps she didn't want to be recognized?"

"Whatcha think yourself, sir? A young woman comin' out of a gentleman's house 'long about one o'clock."

"About one o'clock was it, Binns?"

"About that, sir."

"You say you reached home at about one, Mr. Converse. Did you see anything of this young woman?"

"I did not," replied Lloyd, curtly.

"Well, go on, Binns. Describe her as carefully as you can."

"Yes, sir. As I was a sayin' she was mejum in size, and she had a mop, a thick, curly, bobbed mop of red hair. That took my eye, so's I didn't notice much else. Then, she was wearin' slippers and first off I thought she didn't have on any stockings at all. Just bare legs. But I remembered all the girls wear those flesh-colored stockings now, and the more they

look like the bare skin itself, the better the girls like 'em."

"Very well. She wore what I believe are called nude-colored stockings and slippers. Go on."

"Then I recolleck she had on a little dinky hat——"

"What color?"

"No particular color,—nude, I guess."

"And her coat?"

"A mannish coat, cloth, tailored,—leastaways, that's the idea I got. I ain't bankin' much on my memory of that coat. It didn't make no impression on me, definite like."

"I see. And her dress?"

"That didn't show any to speak of. Short, you know, and probably mostly hid by the coat. I'm tellin' what I remember, and passin' up what I don't seem to recall."

"Quite right, Binns. And we have a fair picture of her after all. Now you're sure she left this house after one o'clock?"

"Sure, sir, 'cause I'd just rung up my box. But it wasn't more'n a few minutes past one."

"Then, if she had been visiting Mr. George Converse, she left before Mr. Lloyd Converse arrived."

"Probably scared off by his comin' in," opined Binns, whose imagination was stirred by the coincidence of the hours.

"Perhaps. Would you know her if you saw her again, Binns?"

"Sure I would. If she was wearin' them same clothes. Maybe not, otherwise. Though I'd know that mop o' hair. Flamin' red, it was. Not orburn or anythin' but plain brickdust red."

"Did she look like a murderess?"

"That she did not! A fixin' her foolish face, and flauntin' her long legs."

"Yet you said she had a furtive air——"

"Well, more like she didn't want to be seen comin' out of that house. Not like she had killed somebody!"

"I can't think, Doctor Jarvis," Kittinger then put it, "that Officer Binns could read the lady's mental attitude with sufficient accuracy to tell all that."

"It isn't necessary to take Binns' opinion on it," returned Jarvis coldly.

And then the inquest went on, with no further new information.

Nobody had anything more to bring forward as evidence. Nobody had any real clue. The blue beads were assumed to have been from a string worn by the red-haired girl, or some other woman. It didn't seem to have a real bearing on the case.

The jury retired to make up their collective mind. They rehearsed the salient points. They reminded one another of Lloyd's desire for money from his brother. Of his sudden return from the

mountains to see his brother. Of the telegram sent to George that called him home. Of the presence in the house of the two brothers at one o'clock. Of the announcement of the murder at two o'clock. Of the absurd and ridiculous yarn of the wet footprint, which might mean anything or nothing.

They ignored the red-haired girl, assuming her to have been a light o'love, who scooted at the sound of Lloyd's footstep in the house.

And then, declaring that Lloyd Converse had motive, weapon, and exclusive opportunity, they brought in as their verdict, that he had foully killed his brother George.

Whereupon and forthwith, Lloyd Converse was arrested.

CHAPTER VII

LLOYD'S FRIENDS

MANY people were surprised at the arrest of Lloyd Converse, but it is safe to say no one was more so than Lloyd himself.

He was dumfounded, flabbergasted, struck all of a heap,—any of those time-worn expressions denoting utter amazement and consternation would fit his case.

For some hours after finding himself in a cell, he sat dazed and silent, refusing to see any one or speak to anybody.

And then, like a lifting curtain this phase passed from him, and with a shake of his broad shoulders and a tight clenching of his fists he took up the cudgels against fate with a grip that promised desperate effort at least.

He sent for Whitney at once, and the lawyer came, accompanied by the detective, Kittinger.

Harrison Whitney was too suave and politic a lawyer to say 'I told you so,' but Converse could read it in his gaze as he shook hands with him.

"I am sorry," Lloyd said frankly, "I am quite ready to believe that this beastly arrest was largely my own fault. I've been thinking things over, and I see you were right, Mr. Whitney. I should have

been more careful of my speech and manner. Less belligerent, less independent."

"Yes, Lloyd, that is all true." Whitney looked thoughtful. "It is a bit late now to rectify your mistake, but of course we're going to do all we can."

"You bet we are!" said Lloyd. "To be arrested is by no means to be tried and convicted. I still have faith in the might of truth, and I'm trusting to you and Mr. Kittinger here, to get me out of this scrape."

The detective looked at him with frank admiration.

"I've never met a man who took a thing of this sort as you're taking it, Mr. Converse," he said; "you are most certainly in a scrape, but maybe we can pull you out."

"Of course you'll pull me out," Lloyd said, cheerily. "I don't like it in here one bit. It's worse than I thought it would be,—though I never thought much about it. You see it was wished on me rather suddenly. Do you really believe, Mr. Whitney, that if I had been a little more—er—affectionate with that jury, they would have let me down easier?"

"I can't say that, Lloyd. They might have brought in an open verdict, perhaps——"

"I wish to Heaven I'd tried it! I'm fed up with this place already!"

"I advised you——"

"I know you did, Mr. Whitney. You advised

me all right. I was pig-headed and cocksure and generally idiotic. But that's past history. The thing is now, can you do anything to help me out of the mess I've got myself into?"

"Of course, I'll do my best, Lloyd, but again I tell you, you must take things more seriously. You can't be arrested for murder one day, and expect to be let out of jail the next day."

"I can, if we find the real murderer, and that's what we're going to do."

Kittinger looked on wonderingly. He didn't know Lloyd Converse and had no idea of the force back of that smiling, happy-go-lucky exterior.

Nor did Whitney know him much better. The lawyer's acquaintance with the brothers had been mostly confined to his business with George. He had had no dealings with Lloyd, save to pay him his allowance at stated times.

So now he sat staring at his new client, a little uncertain what attitude to assume.

But Harrison Whitney was a shrewd business man, and he knew there were some important matters to be discussed at once.

"As your brother's heir," he said slowly, "you are a rich man, Mr. Converse."

Lloyd looked up suddenly, at the title, and grinned.

"Is that why you've dropped the use of my first name?" he asked.

"Well, yes," Whitney assented. "As a wealthy

citizen you are entitled to be called mister, at least when we're talking business."

"Has a man in jail a right to be called a citizen at all?" Lloyd asked. He spoke a little bitterly, for a sudden realization of his inheritance and a flash of memory of Janet's affection for him, made him more conscious of his present plight.

"Oh, yes. And as you say yourself, you're not tried and convicted yet. Lots of things may happen——"

"What can happen?" Lloyd was earnest enough now. "I mean that seriously. What can be done to get me out of here?"

"Only one thing," and Whitney looked grave. "Find the real murderer."

"Can you do that, Mr. Kittinger?" and Lloyd turned to the detective.

"I don't know," he replied, thoughtfully. "It may be possible, but I am not quite prepared to call it probable."

"Well, make it probable, then. Make it inevitable, or I shall get someone who can."

"You can't find a better detective than Kittinger," the lawyer put in. "That's why I engaged him."

"All right, Mr. Whitney. We'll give him a trial. But if he doesn't make good shortly, I claim my right to call in some one else."

"Do you know of any one?"

"No; and I'm satisfied to try out Mr. Kittinger. Go to it, man, but get me results."

"He will," and Whitney nodded his head.

The lawyer's air of decision reassured Lloyd, as it was intended to do. Harrison Whitney was accustomed to reassuring people when it suited his book to do so. And he felt it was for the best to keep up the spirit of his impetuous and erratic young client.

Then, taking some papers from his pocket, he said:

"Do I understand, Mr. Converse, that you want me to carry on regarding the estate of your brother, and its inheritance by you? I mean shall I continue to take charge of things for you—for the present?"

"Well, Mr. Whitney, I certainly want you to do so, but if I didn't, I don't see how I could do differently. I'd have a hard time to set up a new lawyer while I am in here."

"Very true. So, I take it that I shall continue to look after the investments and securities as I have been doing for your brother."

"Yes, if you will. I suppose I am not restricted in any way regarding the money?"

"Not at all. And, it is customary to inquire, have you made a will?"

"No. I never had anything to make a will about. But I will do that at once. Will you draft one for me?"

"Certainly. What are your wishes?"

"George remembered the servants, didn't he?"

"Yes, and a few charities, and—er—he left a small bequest to me."

"Good! I'm glad of it, Mr. Whitney. Well, you put a similar bequest to yourself in my will, leave similar sums to the servants and the charities, and then, make Miss Janet Thurston my residuary legatee."

"Very well."

"In a word, duplicate my brother's will, save that Miss Thurston inherits the main estate instead of myself."

"I understand. I'll make a draft and submit it to you very soon."

Whitney sat quietly, as if waiting further orders. He was a smallish, thin man, and his sparse gray hair scantily covered his long, narrow cranium.

He had a heavy, muscular jaw, and his ears, slightly prominent, showed broad, thick lobes, which he fingered nervously at times.

Yet, though when silent he was uninteresting to look at, as soon as he began to speak his face lighted up with intelligence and he compelled immediate attention.

"Well, then," he said, as Lloyd seemed to have no further remark to make about the will, "I think I'll leave you with Kittinger now. I've engagements but Kit wants a talk with you, and you'd better have it at once. I'll arrange with the people outside that you're not to be interrupted."

"I want to be interrupted if Miss Thurston comes," Lloyd said, quickly. "I don't suppose there'll be any difficulty about her being allowed to see me, but I wish you'd see to it, Mr. Whitney."

"Yes, I'll look after that. You'll be allowed to see pretty much whom you wish."

"There are very few I want to see," Lloyd told him, and the lawyer went away.

"Yours is a peculiar case, Mr. Converse," the detective said; "I only wish I could hold out more hope of finding the real murderer than I see at present. Here you are, arrested for a crime you did not commit, and yet I see no way to look for the person who did commit it."

"You don't?" said Lloyd, coolly. "Then let me tell you, Mr. Kittinger, you'll have to see a way to look, within twenty-four hours, or I'll engage another man. I find no fault with you as yet, but so far, you've done nothing,—and I want results."

"Yes, of course, of course. And results must be forthcoming. Certainly, that is so."

Converse stared at him. He didn't like him, didn't like his personality, and yet he felt himself unjust to doubt his ability before it was even tested.

And Whitney had spoken highly of him as a first-class detective. He must be all right, and it was only Lloyd's inexperience that was at fault.

So he said, pleasantly:

"Now, ask me questions, Mr. Kittinger, or tell me your plans. Let's get together on this thing."

"Yes, Mr. Converse. First of all, do you suspect anybody—anybody at all, of having killed your brother, or of knowing anything about his death?"

"No, I do not! If I did, I wouldn't be sitting here so quietly. I have not the slightest suspicion, not the least idea of any one who could have wanted my brother to die, and I have thought and thought, but I can't get the glimmer of a suspicion of any one. So, I am forced to the conclusion that is was some person with whom I have no acquaintance and of whom I have no knowledge. This makes it a hard case, I know, and I trust you can use some of the evidence or clues that have been found, to help you in your search."

"But there are no clues."

"The wet footprint."

"That has no evidential value. It is too vague in outline. It would fit almost any foot."

"Well, then, there is the red-haired girl."

"I am not sure there is such a person."

"What! You doubt the policeman's story?"

"I don't doubt the story as a story. But I doubt it's belonging to this case. Isn't it a bit absurd to think that a girl or woman was in the house, murdered your brother, and calmly walked out, powdering her nose as she went?"

"Then what does the policeman's tale mean?"

"It seems to me likely that he did see the woman he tells of, but that she came out of some other house,

perhaps one next door, on either side of your own home. He could easily make such a mistake."

"Then go and inquire at those houses! Find out if that surmise of yours is correct. Find out who the girl is and where she came from and went to. Then, if she is in no way connected with the matter, you've cancelled one possibility. Look here, Mr. Kittinger, you ought to have done this already, on your own initiative. Why wait for me to tell you what to do?"

"Please remember, Mr. Converse, I've had little if any time to make any inquiries, any investigations. I shall certainly do as you've suggested, but I should have done it anyway."

"Go on, then, and get busy. And don't make the mistake of ignoring that wet footprint. It must mean something. It was wet when I entered that bathroom. The police say my brother had not had his shoes off. Then, who could have made that print except the murderer? I didn't do it. There were no servants there——"

"Mr. Converse, do you remember the two blue beads?"

"Yes, of course I do. They doubtless belonged to the red-haired girl,—if she did come out of our house. If not, then there was some other woman there. I am obliged to recognize the fact that my brother had woman friends,—questionable woman friends. I hate to do this, but it is true, and if one

of those women killed my brother, I don't propose to suffer for her crime.

"I'm ready to admit, Mr. Kittinger, that I acted like a booby to get myself into this pickle. I really believe if I had kept my head and had been a little less angry and belligerent at the inquest, I might have kept out of jail. But I'm here, and the thing now is to get out and get the right one in. If it proves to be a woman, I'm sorry, I'm sure, but justice must be done. My brother's death is going to be avenged. I shall do all I can,—from here. But I've got to have help—skilled, efficient help. If you can give it, all right. If not,—there are others."

"I should resent your attitude more keenly, Mr. Converse, were I not convinced that you are not quite yourself. Oh, I don't mean you are mentally affected, except as these untoward circumstances have somewhat unbalanced your reasoning powers."

"My reasoning powers are not at all unbalanced, Mr. Kittinger. Now you go on your mission, which is solely to discover my brother's murderer. Do all you can toward that end, and rest assured, if you succeed, your reward shall be commensurate with the efforts you make."

Kittinger left, and Lloyd Converse sat down to commune with himself.

He seemed to be a new man. The crisis which had overtaken him had changed his whole outlook on life.

His deep indignation at being suspected of killing his brother so enraged him, that even his arrest and confinement took on a secondary importance.

He had only begun to think things out. He had dispatched Whitney to make his will and Kittinger to do some sleuthing, but his own brain was in a ferment of plans and schemes to further the ends of justice and right; and he hadn't a doubt in his mind but that he would shortly be freed himself because he had found the true criminal.

His nature was one that rose to an emergency, that was at its best in the face of danger; and his indomitable will and undaunted courage came to his aid now as no advice or assistance from another could do.

From his cell he would direct the search. From his confinement he would pull strings and devise plans that should result in success.

And then Janet Thurston came.

Mrs. Vincent was with her, and they were ushered into his presence with the warning that their call was limited to a short time.

"Never mind," Lloyd cried, gleefully, as he clasped the girl in his arms. "Never mind if Lady Gay is looking on! I must kiss you, dear, and I must have you look in my eyes and tell me of your faith and trust."

And Janet, her own eyes full of tears, gave the

required assurance so fully and freely that even Lloyd's haunting doubts were set at rest.

"But, Lloyd," and Gabrielle Vincent looked at him, curiously, "how are you going to get out of this? And why did you get in it? Mr. Whitney says you brought it on yourself."

"Not quite that, Lady Gay. But I daresay I helped it along, and Lord knows I'm sorry enough now. It seems juries have to be placated, and coddled and petted——"

"Bribed?"

"Oh, no, not that. It's more of a psychological treatment. The suspect has to be duly timid and appealing and that sort of thing. Not high hat, as I was."

"Lloyd, I want to help," Janet said. "Now, we've only a few minutes to talk. Tell me what to do."

"I will, Janet. I've done some quick thinking, and I think you are to be my right-hand man. And, first of all, dear, were you at our house last night when George died?"

"Good gracious, no! What a question!"

"Were you there yesterday? Have you been there lately?"

"No, of course not. I've never been there."

"That's all right, then. But,—I'm mistaken, of course,—but those blue beads looked a lot like a string I've seen you wear."

"Couldn't be. I've lots of beads, of course, every girl has just now. I suppose the red-headed girl dropped them."

"Well, here's your work cut out for you, Jannie dear. Find that red-headed girl. And if you find her, you've saved me. Can you do it?"

"I hope so." She spoke very gravely. "Tell me anything more you can."

"I can't think of anything more. Oh, yes, get in touch with our servants. They're all faithful, and would do anything to help me. Ask them all sorts of questions. Maybe they'll tell you more than they told the police. Get out of them some new evidence or clue. I've got a detective,—but, between you and me I'm not crazy about him."

"That Kittinger person? I'm not, either," Lady Gay declared. "He's too stuck on himself. He thinks he knows it all."

"Whitney thinks so, too," Lloyd told her. "He thinks Mr. Kittinger is a great man."

"Then he probably is," Mrs. Vincent agreed. "Harrison Whitney is one of the best lawyers in the city. Stick to him, Lloyd, whatever you do."

"Of course I'll stick to him, but it's the Kittinger article I'm objecting to. Still, as you say, if Whitney is for him he must be all right."

"Well, give him a tryout. Now we must go. I can't make you out, Lloyd. How can you be so—so chipper—in here!"

"I've got be to be chipper, Lady Gay. I'd die, otherwise. And I've a lot to do. I've got to save myself from a pretty awful fate."

"Don't!" cried Janet, as she flung her arms round his neck.

"Chirk up, girlie," he said, kissing away her tears. "Surely if I can——"

"Yes, Lloyd," and Janet smiled determinedly, "yes, if you can be brave, surely I can, too. And I will! You can bank on that!"

"I bank on you for everything, dear. I'm going to get out of here, for your sake as well as my own, and then we'll forget it all and face life together."

"That's all very well," said Lady Gay, "but tell us quickly, Lloyd, is there anything else. Anything you want or want done——"

"Only this. Send Avery here. I want to see him, and I've not heard that he is coming."

"Very well. Then, good-by for now."

With forced cheerfulness they parted, and again Lloyd Converse was alone with his thoughts.

Somehow, it was harder now. Having seen Janet's dear face made the gloom of his cell seem deeper, and he groaned in the agony that only a strong man can feel when fate is sore against him.

All that evening and all that night, the long hours dragged by, until at last the harassed man fell asleep from sheer physical exhaustion.

And the next morning things looked no brighter.

He began to realize that only when he was receiving or expecting to receive visits from those of the outside world was he in a hopeful mood.

When he had no reason to look for a visitor, he felt so helpless, so despairing that he began to lose hope.

But toward noon, Avery came.

This was a godsend, and Lloyd welcomed him almost boisterously.

"I say, Avery," he began, "I want you for my detective,—not that ass, Kittinger."

"I'm not a detective," Alan Avery told him, but Lloyd went right on.

"I'll tell you what, old chap. I've thought it all out. I'll hold on to Kittinger, but I want you to check up on him. I can't tell you why, but I don't trust him. I don't think he's any good at all. Oh, yes, I know he's Mr. Whitney's choice, but I think he's putting it over on Whitney. I don't believe Mr. Whitney knows him very well. I think he was highly recommended, and so Whitney took him on. And he may be all right, but I don't like his attitudes. I don't think he knows his business. Do you?"

"I know nothing about him. Like you, I don't believe Mr. Whitney knows him so very well. But, I do know, Mr. Whitney wouldn't take him on unless he was satisfied of his skill."

"Yes, I know that, too. And probably he's all

right. But I'm not taking chances. I'm in a bad hole, Avery."

"You're all of that, Converse, and I can't see how you take it as you do."

"Everybody says that. Lord, man, I've got to take it that way, or go under! And, moreover, I've got to save myself. I brought the trouble on myself, and I've got to find the remedy."

"What do you mean—you brought it on yourself?"

"Oh, they all tell me it was my devil-may-care manner, at the inquest, that brought about my arrest. If I'd been conciliatory and,—well, showed the white feather, I suppose, I might have been outside and person or persons unknown accused in my place."

"Do you believe that?"

"I don't know what to believe. And it doesn't matter much now. The thing is to get out of here, and the only way to do that is to give the police a first-class substitute. A really, truly murderer, whom they can hang with justice and right!"

Lloyd's voice rang out with such earnestness that Avery stared at him.

"You don't know who he is, do you?"

"No! If I did, should I be quiet about it?"

"Well,—you might be."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Suppose it—it was somebody you wanted to

shield—some man—or woman, whom you didn't want suspected."

"Look here, Avery, none of that. I don't suspect anybody on earth, in the very least degree. Now, I've got to find a suspect. Somebody killed George. That person is doubtless alive at this moment, walking the streets a free man—or woman. I'll add woman, since you did. And there's always the possibility, since I've learned that old George was more or less mixed up with women. I've hated to make myself admit that, but there seems to be no doubt of it,—I suppose lots of men are like that."

"Yes, of course." Avery spoke impatiently, for he had known for years of this side of George Converse's life. "But let's talk business. What can I do?"

"You can find that red-haired girl," said Lloyd.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VANISHED FLATIRONS

Avery left Lloyd Converse with his mind full of tumultuous and conflicting thoughts.

While with Converse he found it impossible to believe him guilty, but when away from him and out from under the influence of that vital, compelling personality, Avery, like others, found it difficult to conceive of any substitute suspect.

Lloyd had not only motive and opportunity, it seemed he had those things exclusively.

Who else had any reason to kill George Converse? Who else would profit by his death?

Alan Avery was the confidential clerk of Harrison Whitney, and therefore he knew all the secrets of the various clients of the lawyer. He knew, of course the contents of George Converse's will, and knew that save for the small bequest to Whitney and the few legacies to servants and charities, the great bulk of the fortune would revert to Lloyd. He knew how much Lloyd wanted money, how deeply he felt his brother's injustice in the matter, and also, he knew Lloyd's impetuous, volatile temperament.

He would go along in stolid indifference for a time, and then suddenly flare up and show not only righteous indignation but active and desperate energy

for revenge. Avery had known both the brothers for a long time, and he had always more or less looked for some sort of climax to their one disagreement.

And now it had come, and granting the sinister and indicative circumstances, Avery could not help thinking that the odds were in favor of Lloyd's guilt.

Yet, he was ready to look elsewhere should any clue point a direction.

But there seemed to be no clue, always excepting the red-haired girl.

On her Avery banked little. She didn't seem hopeful as a suspect, and too, she most certainly would not come forward and disclose her identity, and how else could it be learned?

Avery strolled up toward the Converse home. It was late, but he liked to walk about the city at night, and, too, he hoped to get a word with Binns, who ought at this hour to be on his beat.

He was; Avery stepped up to the policeman and asked a few questions.

"I'm sorter sorry," Binns told him, "that I stirred up that subject of the young woman I saw. I don't believe she had a thing to do with the murder, —and now every other man that passes, stops to ask me about her!"

"Could it be," inquired Avery, "that she came out of some other house? Not the Converse home?"

"It could not! Unless, that is, she climbed over a back fence first. But when she came out of the

area door, it was the Converse house she came out of. That I can swear to."

"Who lives on either side?" Avery said, looking up at the houses, for they had turned their steps toward the ones in question.

"That side," the policeman pointed, "is Mr. Wingate's house. Been shut up all summer and not opened yet. The other side, Miss Barrett lives. Lives there alone, with two or three servants, but nary a red-head among 'em. Of course I know these things,—it's my business to know such."

"All right, then we'll agree the girl did come out of the Converse house. Now what was she doing there?"

"Too easy. Been there to see Mr. George. Likely as not to get money from him. Dessay she got it, too, for she looked like the cat that et the canary."

"Seemed satisfied and happy, eh?"

"Yes, sir, just that. Kinder jaunty of step, you know, and smilin' as she fussed up her face."

"Not quite the mental attitude of a murderer, then."

"No, sir, she wa'n't no murderer. I'll bet on that."

"Then who did in Mr. Converse?"

"His brother, o' course. Like as not the girl heard him come in at the front door, and she scooted

down stairs and out through the basement. Not knowin' what was a goin' on up above."

"All theory and surmise, Binns. No facts to work on. Now tell me more about her. Think up some points you haven't told the others. You see, if we could get hold of her, it might be a real help, even though she is herself innocent."

"I can't think of another thing, sir, that I haven't told and told a dozen times. I've told how she was dressed and how she looked, till I know my yarn by heart."

"True, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, in a general way. But I didn't look at her much, 'ceptin' her flame o' hair. And so when they have to have a partikler description of her clo'es, I dessay I drawed on my 'magination just a wee bit."

"But you gave the general idea of her clothes, as they impressed you?"

"Oh, yes. The dinky little hat and the tailored coat, I saw plain as plain. And her bare legs,—I mean they looked bare."

"Yes, I know. She had a suit-case, you said?"

"A small one."

"That's queer. Why would a young woman, going to make an evening call on Mr. Converse carry a suit-case?"

"That I don't know, sir. But she had one, and it somehow seemed heavy."

"Now, how could you tell that?"

"Dunno. It's queer what things impress us and what don't when we're not takin' special notice. And of course, I didn't take special notice, as why should I? But I'll tell you another thing. I smelled her."

"Perfumery?"

"No, a kind of soap. You see, my wife she likes that kind of soap,—Bouquet soap, it is,—and it's got a lovely scent, but not a strong reeky smell, do you see? Now, I happen to be especially keen on smells, and as that girl passed me, I caught a whiff of that soap, and I remembered it was the kind my wife likes. I always give her a box of it for Christmas."

Avery was deeply interested. At last here was a definite link between the red-haired girl and the Converse case.

For the soap in the bathroom was of the kind Binns described, and as Avery knew, it had been a fresh cake, put out by Maggie when she arranged the bathroom for George's arrival.

Avery could not see that it meant anything very helpful, but it did seem to prove that the girl, if she came from the Converse house, had probably washed her hands with that very soap.

Had they been stained with the blood of George Converse? Had the girl taken a tub bath too, and had she left the wet footprint?

It seemed more than ever imperative that the girl be found.

But a needle in a haystack was easy of access compared with a search for her! How to go about it? Where to look first? These were the questions that beset Avery's mind.

"Oh, tell me more," he pleaded. "Everything you say, everything you can think of is helpful. Tell me something more, do!"

But Binns had no more to tell.

"She was breezy," he said, "that's how she was, —breezy. Kinder swung along, like she was glad to be a movin'."

But this meant nothing, and Avery despaired of learning anything further from the only one who had seen her.

He went home and cogitated.

The lure of detective work was getting him, he felt the urge to dig and delve into this murder mystery, both for the sake of Lloyd Converse, and also for the game itself.

He wondered if Mr. Whitney would give him a few days off to run the clue down.

The clue of the red-haired girl,—the girl who smelled of soap.

To be sure, there were doubtless thousands of cakes of that sort of soap in use in the city, but the coincidence was there, and too, as he happened to know only a recently opened cake of that soap had a lasting odor. After it had been used a few times, the fragrance was not nearly so noticeable.

He went to bed and tossed restlessly as he dreamed about it all.

Next day he asked Harrison Whitney to grant him a few days vacation for the exercise of his detective talent.

But the lawyer only smiled good-naturedly, and told him that as the matter was in the capable hands of Kittinger, the trained investigator, that he, Avery, would probably prove detrimental to the work, with his well-meant but ignorant and mistaken efforts.

Moreover, there was a lot of new business to be attended to, and Avery's work in the office was especially needed just then.

So the confidential clerk sighed and gave up his dreams of proving himself a super-sleuth.

He told Whitney all the policeman had said about the girl, but the lawyer only smiled at the soap clue, and said he couldn't see that it had any evidential value whatever.

And Avery couldn't, either.

"Converse, of course, will be indicted and will come to trial," Whitney said. "I shall take his case, and I feel sure I can get him acquitted. I don't know yet just what line I shall follow, but I've never lost a criminal case yet, and I'm pretty certain I can get Lloyd off with a light sentence, if any."

"You don't, for a minute, think Lloyd is guilty, do you, Mr. Whitney?" Avery asked, startled at a look in his chief's eyes.

"Don't ask me, Alan. I don't want to say. I may admit, however, that I see no other way to look, as yet. His trial will make a big sensation."

And then the pair took up other business, and the Converse case was dropped for the time being.

But when it was time for Avery to go to lunch, he reverted to it for a moment.

"Is it true talk, Mr. Whitney, that George Converse was mixed up with women—of—of sorts?"

"You want to know about George Converse and the women? Well, I'll tell you. The man was erratic. He'd, we'll say, fall in love with a chorus girl. He'd take her to suppers or cabarets, he'd give her presents,—jewels even,—and then, he'd suddenly sicken of her, and bid her clear out and never trouble him again."

"How would she take that?"

"Very badly, sometimes, and then I would have to make peace,—with George's money. But these things were not of frequent occurrence. And, so far as I know, when Converse died, he had no especial friend among the girls. He was away, off and on, all summer you see, and his escapades, if you choose to call them that, usually occurred in the winter season."

"Didn't Lloyd know of these goings on?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Probably not. The brothers were friendly, and even congenial, but they rarely went out together. They had different sets

of friends. Lloyd cared more for clubs and card playing, George for music and dancing."

"Lloyd a gambler?"

"Oh, no. A bridge flyer now and then. But not a real gambler, no."

"Well, good-by, Mr. Whitney. I may be a few minutes late, returning, but not many. I'm lunching to-day with Mrs. Vincent and Miss Thurston."

"You are! By invitation?"

"Yes, sir. We're going to mull over the case a bit. That young lady is prepared to move Heaven and earth, in her efforts to help Lloyd Converse."

"All right, boy. Go to it. But beware of Mrs. Vincent's wiles. Lady Gay is a charmer!"

"You know her, then?"

"Very well. I've known her for years."

"Oh, I know she's your client, but I meant more personally."

"Yes, I know her personally—and professionally. Socially and in a business way. And, truly, Alan, I warn you against her. Between you and me, she is—well, she's little short of an adventuress."

"Really!"

"That's not for publication, of course, but you're young and impressionable, and I just give you the tip for what it's worth. Run along, now. She won't eat you!"

Whitney laughed at the horrified face of his clerk, and smiled a reassurance, as he added:

"Forewarned is forearmed. Be your own charming self, but keep your head."

Avery pondered over this as he went along.

It had sometimes occurred to him that Mrs. Vincent was a very worldly wise woman, but he never would have gone so far as to use the term adventuress.

Yet now that it had been put into his mind, he recollected several occasions when it would have come close to fitting her.

Still, he reflected, that did not mean that there was anything of the same sort to be said of Miss Thurston, for though the two lived together, the girl was so much younger that they could have little in common.

And when, a few moments later, he was seated at the charmingly appointed luncheon table of Lady Gay, he found it difficult and well-nigh impossible to remember the hints Mr. Whitney had thrown out.

For the hostess was all that could be imagined of the most correct and conventional, and the pretty Miss Thurston was so appealing and wistful that Alan found himself again giving way to a determination to help to free Lloyd Converse from what he felt was a false imprisonment.

"Oh, please, please, Mr. Avery," Janet was already begging him, "please help me. Can't we join forces and succeed where the detectives fail?"

"Have they failed yet?" Avery asked her, speak-

ing seriously, as one needs must in the face of her own grave demeanor.

"Why, yes,—that is, they've found nothing. Now, Lloyd thinks you're more of a detective at heart, than the police or than that Kittinger man who is on the job."

"Anyway, Mr. Avery," Lady Gay put in, "tell us what you think about it all. You don't believe Lloyd guilty, do you?"

"I most assuredly do not. And while I have no real reason to accuse the red-haired girl, as we must call her, yet I do feel that if we could find her, her testimony would be of real value. We must find her —I'm determined to try."

"Let us call her Lucille," said Lady Gay, whimsically. "For no reason, only that it is easier to mention her by name, and most Lucilles have red hair."

"Very well," and Avery fell in with her whim, "then let's find Lucille."

"I'll start out this very afternoon," Janet said, eagerly, "if you'll tell me where to look."

"That's just the point,—where could one look?" asked Mrs. Vincent.

"It is pretty hopeless," Avery agreed, "but there are the choruses. You see, Mr. Whitney says that George Converse affected the chorus girl type of lady friends,—oh, my Heavens! I forgot he told me that in confidence, so please forget I said so. But,

anyway, there can't be many chorus girls who are rather large than small, rather tall than short, rather stout than slim, and with bushy, flaming red hair."

"That is a starter. How did you get all that description?"

"I only pieced it together from Binns' details of her appearance. It may be all wrong, but he did give me that impression."

"Yes," Lady Gay nodded her head. "That's the mental picture I got from his story as I heard it retold."

And also, Avery told them about the soap.

Mrs. Vincent laughed outright at this clue, but Janet said:

"It isn't to be laughed at, dear. I, like the policeman, have a keen sense of odors, and I can often recognize the scent of a toilet soap on my friends' hands. It is quite as noticeable to me as a perfume or a toilet powder fragrance. And why not? A perfume is recognizable to almost any one. Why not a soap scent?"

"Why not?" echoed Avery. "And we know the soap in George Converse's bathroom is of the Bouquet variety."

"I'm going round to the Converse house after lunch," Janet announced. "I shall see the servants, and I may pick up something."

"Do go," Avery urged. "Lloyd asked me to do so,—to talk to the servants I mean, but I can't go

to-day, we're too busy at the office. Are the servants there now?"

"Off and on," Janet replied. There's some one there all the time, I think. I'd like to see the women. I think they'd be more profitable than that butler. He's like a graven image."

"Any of them would talk," Mrs. Vincent suggested, "if they thought it was for the good of Lloyd Converse."

"I hope so," Janet said, wistfully. "Anyway, I'll go. Come round this evening, won't you Mr. Avery, and I'll tell you what happens."

Avery promised, and then found it was time to hasten away if he would get back to the office in time to escape censure.

Janet concluded to go alone to the Converse home.

Lady Gay offered to go with her, but the girl said she thought she might get better results by herself.

"Perhaps I can worm things out of them that they might hesitate to say before so august a personage as your beautiful self," she told Gabrielle, smiling up into the pink and white face of her friend.

If Gabrielle Vincent had any of the traits of an adventuress they were not then in evidence. She looked the picture of gentle, kindly solicitude for the well-being and best interests of the young girl beside her.

Though her blonde hair was artificially colored,

though her piquant little face was made up with extreme care and skill, though the lines the years had pencilled could not be entirely obliterated by art, yet Gabrielle's heart was warm and her mind was young. She loved her charge, Janet, and she would do anything in her power for the girl's good or for her happiness.

"Very well, dearie, run along, then, and good luck attend you."

So Janet, attired in a smart street suit, and becoming hat, went round to the house where George Converse had lived and died.

It was a walk of several blocks, but so engrossed was she in her own thoughts that she arrived before she realized it.

She rang the bell, which was answered by a neatly turned out maid.

"You're Maggie, aren't you?" Janet asked, with her disarming smile.

"Yes, Miss. Did you want to see me?"

"I do, please," and Janet stepped quickly inside, lest the door be shut against her entrance.

Maggie looked a little doubtful, but under the spell of the girl's evident determination, she showed her into the library.

Janet took an easy chair, and then said, quietly:

"Please sit down, Maggie. I want a few moments' talk with you, and it is on an important matter."

The maid sat down on the edge of a chair, her timid face paling a little as she realized she was to be questioned.

"Would you rather see my mother, miss?" she asked, eagerly. "She's here now."

"I may see her later,—I'll have a talk with you first. Now, don't be frightened, Maggie. First, let me tell you, I'm—I'm engaged to Mr. Lloyd Converse."

"Laws, miss, you don't say so!" and all at once Maggie's embarrassment vanished. If this lovely young lady was Mr. Lloyd's sweetheart, surely there was no cause for fear. "What can I do for you?"

"I don't know, Maggie. I only want to talk to you about—about both the brothers. Of course, you can answer questions now, that would have been impossible and impertinent before Mr. George died. Tell me, Maggie, did he have friends coming here sometimes? Lady friends?"

"Not as I know of, miss—that is, I never saw anybody,—but—well yes, I'll say he did."

"Very well, I'm not interested in them at all. Unless, you know of one who had red hair,—do you?"

"No ma'am." Maggie spoke earnestly. "Everybody has asked me about that red-headed girl, but I never saw her. Nor my mother never did, nor Thorp never did. I'm thinkin' Binns made that story up."

"Oh, no, Maggie, he didn't make it up. There was a red-haired girl here that night, whether you ever saw her or not. They found her handkerchief you know."

"Yes, they told me. That wasn't my handkerchief, or mother's."

"No. So you see there was such a visitor. Now, Maggie, I'm going to find her. Understand? Find her. And I'm wondering if you can't help me."

"How miss?"

"Oh, dear, that's what I don't know. Well, suppose I go and look over Mr. George's rooms. I know the police have scoured them, but sometimes a woman can see what a man might miss."

"Yes, ma'am, that might be. I'll get the keys from mother, miss."

Janet followed the maid down to the kitchen, and there found Sarah, the cook, evidently in a state of amazed anger.

"How do you do, Miss Thurston," she said, as Maggie bashfully presented the visitor. "You're here as Mr. Lloyd's fiancy, eh? Well, here's something as has just happened. That is, I've just found out that it has happened."

"What is it, Sarah?" Janet asked, hoping against hope that it was something of definite importance.

"Why, two of my flatirons is gone!"

"Flatirons!" Janet looked blank.

"Yes'm, I have two old-fashioned flatirons as

always sets on this little shelf here. Now they're missin' and who in the world could of taken 'em?"

"You don't think, do you, that it has any connection with the—the mystery? How could it have?"

"I don't know I'm sure. But they disappeared that night that Mr. George was killed. For when I came in that next morning first thing I did was to lock this cupboard, where the irons was. And it ain't been unlocked till this very minute, and they're gone."

"Why did you lock it that morning, Sarah?"

"Because I keep a drawin' of tea,—special tea, back there, tucked behind the ironing blanket, and I didn't want them police a meddlin' with my tea."

"And the irons are gone?"

"Plumb gone, ma'am! No hide or hair left of 'em!"

CHAPTER IX

BLUE BEADS

On his return to Harrison Whitney's office, Avery told him all he had learned about the Converse matter, which amounted, Whitney observed, to just nothing at all.

"We know all there is to know about the red-haired girl," Whitney said, "unless somebody is smart enough to find her. And, even at that, I doubt if she could be proved guilty."

"'Lucille,' Mrs. Vincent calls her," said Avery, smiling.

"Lucille! How does she know her name?"

"Oh, she doesn't. She just invented that so we'd have something to call the mysterious person."

"A queer make-up, Lady Gay," Whitney said, reflectively. "She's a woman who would, I think, be capable of murder herself. Not in this case," he added, hastily. She had no motive for killing George Converse. On the contrary, I sometimes thought she was in love with him."

"With George?" asked Avery in astonishment.

"Yes. I know she pretends she scarcely knew him, but I think she may have known him better than she admits. Still, it's only a notion of mine."

"You don't harbor any suspicion against the girl, do you?"

"Janet? Lord, no! She wants to marry Lloyd, of course, but she never would kill Lloyd's brother—or anybody else!"

"No, I suppose not. But the beads that Kittinger found in the room where the dead man was, are precisely the same as a string of blue beads Miss Thurston had on to-day at luncheon.

"Oh, I daresay those beads are turned out by thousands,—it's not surprising they should be like hers."

"I think it's a point," said Avery, stubbornly. "A point that ought to be checked up. I'm going round there again, this evening. And I'm going to ask Miss Thurston when and where she last broke her string of blue beads. I'm told the strings are always breaking."

"All right, Avery, do anything you can to get at the truth. But don't drag Janet Thurston into it, unnecessarily. If she had a hand in the crime, all very well. But I can't think she did, and if she was there that night at all, it might have been for a very different reason,—say, she went there to see Lloyd."

"I never thought of that! She might have been there to meet Lloyd by appointment, neither of them expecting George to be in the house."

"But Lloyd sent his brother that telegram."

"I don't believe he did. And that's another thing I'm going to check up on. In the first place, Mr. Whitney, it's absurd on the face of it, to think a man would send a wire, beginning Dear Brother! A letter, yes. But a telegram, never! Did you ever send a telegram beginning 'Dear—' anybody?"

"No. That is a bit queer, isn't it? I begin to think, Alan, you have some detective ability after all. But you'll have to let up on your sleuthing for this afternoon. I want you to go over the files of the Patterson case. And keep your mind on it,—don't let your thoughts stray off, for it's a mighty important matter."

"Yes, sir, I know it. I'll do it up all right."

And Avery buckled down to his work with a single-hearted industry that made Whitney rejoice anew in the efficiency and faithfulness of his confidential clerk.

"Going to Miss Thurston's this evening, then?" the lawyer said, as closing time came round, and the two men prepared to leave the office.

"Yes. Not to dinner, and I'm glad of it. They have altogether too rich food for me. The luncheon this noon started up my indigestion again. And, incidentally, I'm not invited to dinner, which is another good reason for not going."

"A fine one! Shall you be there late? I may drop in myself after I go to have a talk with Converse.

"I suppose I'll be there till ten or eleven. Yes,

come up and we can talk over things. And you take a look at the little girl's beads. If she doesn't have them on, I shall ask her to get them."

"Don't scare her."

"Not at all. If she is perfectly innocent, which of course she is, she won't mind telling us anything there is to tell about her beads."

"No. I say, Avery, there's far more reason to suspect the older woman,—if either. Maybe she sometimes wears Janet's beads."

"That might be. But we can feel our way cautiously. Well, I'll be off. I want to stop at a drug store and get some soda mints for my old indigestion. I may have a few left."

Avery felt in his waistcoat pocket, and drew forth two small white tablets.

"Yes, I have a couple,—that will be enough for this evening. I'll eat a light supper, and swallow these 'long about nine o'clock. They always fix me up."

"Can't be a very dangerous case," Whitney laughed, "if you can cure it as easily as that! I thought you meant acute indigestion."

"No, but the doctor says it may run to that, if I don't take care."

"Better take care you don't become an old hypochondriac! A young fellow like you, worrying about his health! Here, Grandpa, let me help you on with your overcoat!"

Laughingly, Whitney held out the light topcoat, pushed Avery into it, pulled it straight, and then patting his shoulders assisted him out the door as if he were a feeble old man.

Avery only laughed, his mind full of other matters.

He went home to his boarding-house, and ate a light supper, all the time thinking hard over the problem of the death of George Converse.

Whatever the truth of the matter might be, he couldn't believe Lloyd Converse guilty, and he fairly ached to get his hands on the real criminal.

Not for a minute did he suspect either of the two women whom he expected to see that evening, and his uncertainty as to the blue beads was merely curiosity about them and not in the least suspicion of Janet or of Lady Gay, either.

The pretty little Mrs. Vincent was too sweet-tempered and good-natured to be suspected of murder, and anyway, Avery couldn't see a woman's hand in it.

"Lucille" as he whimsically thought of the red-haired girl, was doubtless at the house that night to see George Converse. But she was not the murderer, he felt sure.

And yet, that threw it back to Lloyd, for it seemed, as near as he could compute the time, that Lloyd came in at the very hour that Lucille went out.

If that were so, then it rested between the two,

and much as Avery doubted the work of a woman, he preferred the thought to a suspicion of Lloyd Converse.

It was a moil, any way one looked at it; and Avery sat in his room, in a brown study, until time to go to make his call.

He didn't dress, as Lady Gay had bid him come informally, and his neat business suit was new and well-fitting.

He was in a grave and downcast mood, and as he presented himself, he did not smile, and Lady Gay rallied him.

"Come, come," she said, "Mr. Avery, you must not look so terribly downhearted. Surely some thing will happen to give us a new clue."

"I can't see any way to look, Mrs. Vincent," he returned. "Did you learn anything new to-day, Miss Thurston?"

"No," said Janet, who was as despondent of countenance as Avery himself. "Except," she smiled a little, "the mysterious disappearance of two flatirons."

"Flatirons!"

"Yes," and she told him of Sarah's loss.

"Well," Avery said, "I can't see the remotest connection between crime and the flatirons. Can you?"

"No," Janet replied, absently fingering her beads.

And then Avery spoke, impulsively.

"Your beads, Miss Thurston. Do you know they are identical with the ones found in Mr. Converse's room?"

"Are they?" she returned, listlessly. "Well, what does that show? I, most certainly, was not there that night at all."

"You didn't know Mr. Lloyd Converse was coming home that night?"

"No. I hadn't heard from him for a week or more. I didn't expect him home for another week or so."

"Had he written you when he expected to come home?"

"Not definitely, no. Speak plainly, Mr. Avery. As you know, I don't resent any questions or suspicions. I am so anxious to find out who killed Lloyd's brother, I will answer any questions or do anything I possibly can to help."

"Well, then, the question of the beads worries me a little. To be sure, lots of young women have beads alike, but those you have on are peculiar in their markings,—blue with streaks of purple on them—and it is interesting to speculate who else could have worn beads just like those and visited the Converse home that night."

"It is so," exclaimed Janet. "Now, let's get at it systematically. I bought these beads when I was away in the summer."

"Do they break occasionally? I mean does the string break?"

"Yes, every once in a while. I restring them myself, on dental floss."

"I see. And when did the string break last?"

"Let me think. Why, it was here, one evening, about two weeks ago. Remember, Gay? We had a small card party, one table of bridge and one of poker. And my beads broke and fell all over the floor. The men scrambled down to pick them up."

"Did you get them all? Could you tell, when you restrung them?"

Avery looked so earnest that Janet thought carefully.

"I don't know, Mr. Avery," she said. "I can't tell you. As they were picked up and handed to me, I put them in that little box on the table there, the Florentine one. And a day or two later, I took them out and strung them. No, I can't say whether a few were missing or not. But I'm sure if they had been they would have been found when the maid cleaned the room, and would have been given to me."

"Yes, doubtless. Now who were at that party?"

"Wondering a little, Janet told the names of about a dozen people. Of them all, none was familiar to Avery except the names of Harrison Whitney and George Converse.

"George Converse!" he exclaimed, "I thought you didn't know him at all."

He suddenly remembered Whitney telling him that Lady Gay did know Lloyd's brother, and was, perhaps in love with him.

"I didn't," Janet returned, "but Lady Gay did. He's not specially fond of card playing, but he came to our little party."

"Then," and Avery looked thoughtful, "that may explain the beads. George Converse may have picked up a couple, meaning to return them to you, and slipped them in his pocket for the moment, and gone home with them."

"Yes, of course that could have happened," Janet said. "But why wouldn't he put them in the box with the others?"

"I can see it," Lady Gay cried. "George was at the Bridge table, and that was the other side of the room. You were at the poker table, Jannie, and if some of the beads rolled over that way, George would naturally pick them up and put them in his pocket to hand to you afterward. Then he forgot it and carried them home, and never thought of them again."

"Go on," said Avery, abruptly. "How did they chance to be on the floor the morning after the murder?"

"I don't know," Lady Gay said, impatiently. "but there are lots of explanations. They may have been there ever since the night of our party here. He pulled them out of his pocket with his handker-

chief, say, or spilled them out somehow, and they just stayed there."

"But the room had been cleaned."

"Oh, well, you know what servants are. When the family is away in summer time the maids are slack about their work. Anyway, Mr. Avery, I can't see any reason to suspect Janet on account of those beads. Can you?"

"Most certainly not, Lady Gay. I only want to see how the beads come into the story at all."

"They don't," she said, a little impatiently. "Now, Mr. Avery, we'll have a little refreshment, and then we must get right down to work on this thing. I want to get Lloyd Converse out of jail, and between you and me, I don't think much of that Kittinger person. Do you?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Vincent, I think he's clever enough. But we must admit he has very little to go upon. He's working on the beads as a clue and——"

"Oh, Mr. Avery," Lady Gay's face paled, "don't tell him they are Janet's beads, will you? I don't want her name dragged in at all."

"But if he knows that, he can stop searching for the owner of the beads."

"No,—or, I mean, yes, of course he will do that. But if he gets the idea that they are Janet's beads, he'll suspect her! I can't have Janet's name brought in at all! In the papers and all that! Oh, please,

Mr. Avery, *please,* don't tell anybody they are Janet's beads!"

A maid came then, in answer to her ring, and Lady Gay ordered whisky and ginger ale to be brought.

"Help yourself, Mr. Avery," she invited as the tray was brought and set on a small table, "and fix a glass for me. I'm all in with worry over this matter of the beads! Give Janet some ginger ale, she doesn't want anything else. Yes, there, that's enough."

She held out her hand for the glass Avery gave her, and took a long draught before she spoke again. Then she said, "Janet found the soap paper in the waste basket in George Converse's bedroom."

"Soap paper?" said Avery, staring at her over his glass.

"Yes, you know the policeman, that queer Binns, said that Lucille smelled of Bouquet soap. Well, that much is verified, for the paper proves that it was Bouquet soap in the bathroom."

"We knew that anyway," Avery said, "for the soap is there yet,—unless the police took it as evidence."

"Yes, and we know Lucille used the soap. So then, isn't it probable that she was the one who took off the paper,—Maggie has said she put out a new cake, paper and all. And if Lucille did take off the paper and threw it in the waste basket, isn't there a possibility that there may be finger-prints on it?"

"Surely," Avery cried, draining his glass in his excitement. Where is the paper?"

"Janet had it. She brought it home with her, very carefully."

"Yes," Janet said, "I thought of finger-prints as soon as I saw the paper. Of course, even if there are any on it, which is doubtful, I don't see how we can find Lucille that way. It isn't likely she has been finger-printed, or whatever they call it. But every little helps and I brought it along on the chance. I wonder the police didn't take it."

"The police are far from astute," Avery said, shaking his head. "Let me see the paper, please."

Janet gave it to him, picking it up gingerly from a box in which she had placed it.

Avery looked at it closely, but seemed disappointed as he said:

"I can't see any prints on it, but that doesn't mean there are none. It must go to the experts. Shall I take it, and give to Mr. Whitney? He is anxious to get any clue. By the way, he said he'd drop in here to-night."

"I'm glad of that," Janet said, "I want to tell him about the flatirons."

"You don't think they figure in the case, do you?" said Avery, incredulously.

"No,—not exactly. Yet it's strange that they should disappear that very night."

"Oh, we don't know that they did. The cook could easily be mistaken about that."

"Well, they're gone," Janet urged. "Now, why should they be stolen?"

"Why should anything be stolen? But I can't link them up with the tragedy."

"I can't, either," said Lady Gay. "It's all too much for me. I can't see any way to look. Guess I'll have another high-ball. No, thanks, Mr. Avery, let Janet fix it. She knows just how I like mine." Janet rose and busied herself with the glasses and siphon, and then gracefully handing Avery his refilled glass, she handed another to Lady Gay, who took it and stood by the mantel as she sipped it.

The girl watched her a little anxiously, for Gabrielle Vincent didn't often drink whisky and when she did, it denoted an occasion of great importance.

As Lady Gay stood by the fireplace, her foot tapped restlessly on the rug and Avery looked up suddenly, wondering what she was about to say next.

He took a long pull at his own glass, and then a strange contortion passed over his face.

His mouth opened, his eyes stared vacantly, and with a crash his glass fell from his fingers and broke in a dozen pieces.

Then, as the two women watched in horror, Avery fell forward in his chair, and with a short, sharp convulsion fell off it to the floor, in a terrible ghastly heap.

He made no outcry, gave no word of warning, but as he lay still and inert, it was impossible not to realize that the man was dead or dying.

Janet sank back in her chair and put her hands over her eyes.

Lady Gay, quicker of action, rang the bell hard and wildly.

A frightened maid servant came running, and her mistress spoke, excitedly:

"Telephone for a doctor, Martha. Get Doctor Griffith at once. Tell him to hurry."

Then as the maid hastened on the errand, Gabrielle Vincent went over to the stricken man.

"Don't be alarmed, Janet," she said, quietly. "It's nothing that could be helped. It's an attack of acute indigestion,—I don't think he is dead,—though he does look so."

"Oh, he is—he is dead! Are you sure it's indigestion?"

"Yes, he has had it for some time, he told me so only to-day."

"I wish the doctor would come—can't we do anything?"

"I don't know what to do, dear. Get some smelling salts,—though I fear it is too late."

Janet ran for the salts, and Lady Gay, alone with the ghastly figure looked at it with what seemed almost an air of relief.

"You won't tell about Jannie and her beads now,

young man," she murmured, with a note of exultation in her voice.

Then Janet returned with the salts bottle, but at the same time the doctor came. He lived nearby and he came round at once, on hearing the maid's frightened summons.

"Yes, he's dead," Doctor Griffith said, upon examination. "What happened?"

"Nothing at all," said Mrs. Vincent. "We were sitting and talking. Mr. Avery had had one highball and was about to begin another, when he gave a start,—seemed to have a sort of convulsion or spasm, and fell right over. He was subject to indigestion, so I think it must have been an acute attack."

"It certainly has all the symptoms of that," Doctor Griffith said. "But it is my duty to call the medical examiner. I'm sorry to inconvenience you——"

"Oh, doctor, not the police!" cried Mrs. Vincent. "Oh, I can't stand that! We're in such trouble anyway—oh, can't you take the man away, and have your examiner see him somewhere else? It isn't fair to bring police in here and all that, just because he chanced to have his seizure in my house!"

"I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Vincent," said the doctor, but I have no choice in the matter. I am obliged to call Doctor Jarvis. If he agrees that it is a case of indigestion then we will merely take the body away and you will have no further embarrassment."

Already Doctor Griffith was at the telephone and the medical examiner was summoned.

Before he arrived, however, Harrison Whitney came.

"I told Avery I'd come up here," he said, as he greeted his hostess. "Why,—what's the matter? Why is Griffith here? Anybody ill?"

"Oh, Mr. Whitney," Gabrielle cried, clasping his arm, "I'm so glad you came. Mr. Avery is dead——"

"What! Dead?"

"Yes, he just fell over and died. An attack of acute indigestion, I'm sure——"

He complained of that trouble to-day, I remember, but I didn't dream it was so serious! Where is he?"

"In here. Come on in."

She led the way and with a nod of greeting to the doctor, Whitney went close to the dead man.

"It certainly looks like sudden acute indigestion," he said, turning to the doctor. "That contorted face and the way the body has fallen——"

"Yes," the medical man agreed. "It looks like that to me. But I have to have Jarvis in,—of course you see that."

"Yes, of course. But it's hard on these ladies."

"I know, and I'm sorry. But it is imperative. I'm hoping he'll agree with my diagnosis, and we can get the body away to-night."

"Oh, surely, that must be done," Whitney, exclaimed, feeling deeply sympathetic with the evident distress of Mrs. Vincent.

Janet had left the room, unable to stand any more horrors.

And then Doctor Jarvis came.

He sent the others away, and he and Griffith held an examination and a consultation.

At last he summoned Mrs. Vincent and told her with much regret that there was doubt as to the cause of Alan Avery's death, and an autopsy would be held to determine the truth.

CHAPTER X

ANOTHER TRAGEDY

"OH, OH," Lady Gay wailed, in distress and with her pretty face wrinkled into an expression of petulant annoyance, "why was this terrible thing wished on me? I think we had enough trouble, with Lloyd under arrest and all, and now this man, practically a stranger, dead in our house! Janet, I can't stand it!"

Her big, blue eyes overflowed with angry tears, and her rosy cheeks showed streaks as the tears made little furrows down through the rouge.

"Do help us, Mr. Whitney," the excited lady begged. "You are always helpful, now do your best. Can't you get these doctors to take Mr. Avery away before they have that fearful—postmortem?"

"Can it be done, Jarvis?" the lawyer asked him. "I'd take it as a great favor if you could relieve Mrs. Vincent of this tragic burden."

"No, Mr. Whitney, you know it can't be done," Jarvis returned, crisply. "We have to go through with these things in regular order. A sudden death has occurred, and I have to use the regular machinery to find out all I can concerning the circumstances. There must be an autopsy, and then, unless we discover that the death was caused by natural means, there must be an inquest. Don't try to beg the ques-

tion, there is no help for it. I'm sorry to inconvenience Mrs. Vincent, but the law must take its course."

Gabrielle Vincent heard and turned pale beneath her artificial coloring.

"An inquest!" she breathed, a look of horror coming into her eyes.

"Brace up to it, Gay," Harrison Whitney said, "it won't be so very dreadful. Merely a formal proceeding——"

"Oh, Harry, how you talk! What could be worse than a—a murder in my house, and an inquest, and——oh,——"

She burst into tears and ran out of the room.

"Where can we take him?" asked Jarvis, with a callous disregard of feminine nerves. "Is there a spare room, Miss Thurston?"

"What? Oh, yes," and Janet with a brave effort at self-control, led the way to the pretty little guest-room.

The apartment, on one of the higher blocks of Fifth Avenue was a large and modern affair, with plenty of rooms and bathrooms.

The two doctors moved Avery's body to the guest-room, and then shut themselves in.

"Tell me all about it," Harrison Whitney said, taking Janet by the arm, and leading her to a sofa.

"First I must find Gay. I fear she is suffering."

The girl found Mrs. Vincent in her own room. She was repairing the ravages that grief and excite-

ment had made in her appearance, and had changed into a simple black chiffon frock that seemed to her more in the picture than the bright-colored gown she had taken off.

"Better put on something white, Jannie," she said; "looks more respectful, with death in the house."

"How can you think of clothes!" the girl exclaimed, but Lady Gay returned, "Why not? Alan Avery was no relative of ours, but he was our guest, and there is a fitness of things to be observed,—anyhow, do run and get into a little crêpe de chine, or something like that."

And as she was always accustomed to obey Gabrielle, Janet did so.

Gay hurried to the living-room, where Whitney was pacing up and down.

"What does it all mean, Harry?" she said, pausing in front of him and looking up into his eyes.

"Well, Gay, what does it mean?"

He looked soberly down at her, a dark frown gathering on his forehead.

Though not a tall man, Whitney was half a head above the little lady before him. His steel-blue eyes looked down into her angry face, and he pressed his thin lips together in his inability to answer her.

Yet even as he spoke, she gained courage and a sense of helpful support.

Whitney was like that. It was his nature to help

people, to act for people, to encourage and comfort people.

"Don't take it too hard, Gay," he said, comfortingly. "And remember, I've not been told about it yet. Do sit down and give me an outline of what happened. What were you all doing?"

"Nothing. We had finished dinner before Alan came, and we all sat around talking,—of course, talking over Lloyd's case. Janet had just showed the soap paper——"

"Soap paper?"

"Yes, but I'll tell you about that afterward. I want to ask you before she comes in—oh, Harry, you don't think Janet poisoned Alan Avery, do you?"

"What an idea! Of course not! Are you crazy, Gabrielle?"

"But listen. We were having high-balls. I seldom take them, and Janet, of course, never. She had plain ginger ale. But she had just mixed two for Alan and me,—she does it so prettily, I taught her how,—and she gave them to us, and then Alan took a drink of his, and fell right over,—dead."

"Immediately?"

"Yes; it couldn't have been half a minute. His face first went queer, and he looked dazed,—not in pain but more stupefied. Then, he toppled over and his glass fell from his hand. In an instant he was dead——"

"How do you know?"

"Oh, you can't mistake that death stroke. He turned gray."

"Maybe it was a stroke,—apoplexy or paralysis."

"He's too young for that. No, it's acute indigestion,—it must be, it shall be! Harrison, can't you see to it that it shall be?"

"If you mean, make it appear that, when it isn't, I can only say, not with those doctors. They are too shrewd and also too honest. I can't help you out that way, Gay—" he looked at her strangely. "But why do you think of poison at all? It is absurd, on the face of it."

"Yes, I know,—but I'm frightened,—oh, Harrison, I'm so frightened."

"What of? You're acting very strangely, Gay. Why are you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm all upset, and surely you can't wonder at that!"

"No," said Whitney, and then Janet returned.

As Gay had instructed, she had put on a soft little frock of white crêpe, and very sweet and dear she looked as she entered, her big black eyes soft with brimming tears and her pale face tense with enforced self-control.

"I don't understand," she said, as she sank into a low chair, "do the doctors think it—it wasn't indigestion?"

"Don't speculate, child," Whitney advised, in a kindly tone. "We'll learn their decision in a few

moments. Had Avery seemed all right up to the—the last?"

"Yes, entirely so," Janet averred, but Gabrielle said, hesitatingly,

"No, I don't agree. I think he—he seemed out of sorts all the evening."

"Why, Gay, I didn't notice anything like that. He was serious, and greatly interested in talking over the Converse matter, but he certainly was well, physically."

"Hush, Janet, you didn't notice. I say he was not well. He was in pain, I'm sure."

Whitney looked at her. He knew that Lady Gay was making this up, but he couldn't think why. Why did she want to prove that Avery felt ill?

But, of course, he reflected, it was merely on the chance that foul play might later be suspected, and if it could be proved the man was really ill, then death from acute indigestion was more clearly indicated.

But whatever Gay's secret thoughts, they were of little weight, for just then, Doctor Griffith came into the room, and said, slowly:

"Alan Avery was killed by a dose of virulent and deadly poison."

He said no more, nor did the three who heard him say any word in response.

In another moment Doctor Jarvis appeared.

"It's poison," he corroborated, "and it is either murder or suicide. I've no reason to suspect murder,

if we can prove the man had any thought of killing himself."

"He hadn't," cried Janet, "how absurd! Why would Mr. Avery kill himself?"

"Hush, Janet," Gabrielle said, sternly, "you know nothing about it—say nothing. Does that mean there must be an inquest and all those horrors?"

"I'm afraid it does, Mrs. Vincent. But I must put a few questions, right here and now."

Jarvis assumed his official air, and flung questions thick and fast, so that it seemed almost as if the inquest had already begun.

"When did Mr. Avery arrive here?" he asked, of Lady Gay.

"About nine o'clock," she replied, suddenly cool and composed in her manner.

"You sat in this room all the evening?"

"Yes."

"Did Mr. Avery leave the room at all?"

"No," she said, but Janet interrupted:

"Yes, he did. He went out into the hall to get a notebook from the pocket of his overcoat."

"So he did," said the other, "I forgot that."

"Please answer carefully," directed the medical man. "Did Mr. Avery eat or drink anything here, except the high-balls already referred to?"

"No."

"Yes, he did," Janet broke in again. He ate two

or three pieces from that candy box on the table there, and he picked up a few of the nuts in that dish next to it."

"Oh, so he did," Mrs. Vincent agreed. "That is, I saw him eat the candies, I don't remember the nuts, especially."

"If you don't remember, say so," the Doctor said, severely, "but don't make wrong statements. Now, do either of you recollect anything else,—anything at all, which he ate or drank? Did he have a glass of plain water?"

"Yes, earlier," said Mrs. Vincent. "He asked for it, and the maid brought it and then, soon after, I had the whisky brought in."

"And he mixed his own high-balls?"

"The first one," Janet answered, slowly, "and the second one I poured for him."

"And one for me at the same time," added Gay.

"Yes," Janet agreed.

"And he drank of this one, and fell dead?" the doctor proceeded, inexorably.

"Yes," Janet said, in her clear way. "That's exactly what happened. How do you explain it, Doctor?"

"How do you?" he parried.

"I don't," she said, helplessly. "I can't. I can't think of any explanation. Had there been any poison in the liquor or in the ginger ale, it must have affected Mrs. Vincent, too.

"Where's the glass?" said the doctor, suddenly, looking about.

"I sent the whole tray out," Mrs. Vincent replied. "I couldn't bear to see it around."

"But it's evidence,—we must have it. Call your servant who took it away!"

In answer to the bell, there appeared a scared-looking maid whose white face told of her alarm and fright at the tragedy.

"Did you take away the tray with the bottles and glasses?" the doctor asked, with a menacing frown.

"Y—yes, sir, Mrs. Vincent bade me, sir."

"Have you washed the glasses?"

"Yes, sir, they're all put away. Shall I bring fresh ones, sir?"

"No! Get out!" and the affrighted maid disappeared.

Doctor Jarvis rarely lost his temper, and when he did, it was usually because of a mistake of his own.

And now, he had certainly made a mistake, and had allowed important evidence to be destroyed. He should have seen to it, first of all that those glasses were carefully secured against meddlers.

And now, their evidence was lost forever! The tale they could have told was shrouded in mystery.

Whether poison was in the glass from which

Avery drank, might be conjectured, might be suspected, but could never be proved.

It was a terrible, an inexcusable slip. Doctor Jarvis would be chided, and very justly, for such a blunder.

He tried his small best to repair it.

"Have those glasses brought in," he ordered, suddenly, and Mrs. Vincent gave the order.

In a few moments, the glasses in question, now washed and polished, were on the table. Also, the whisky bottle, the ginger ale bottles, and the small glass pail of ice, that had been on the tray when first brought in.

Finger-prints meant nothing, as there was no one to suspect outside the persons present at that moment.

Poison, could not, of course, be detected in any one of the glasses nor could any suspicious odor be noticed.

Without a word, Jarvis arranged the tray and its contents on a small table. To this he added the box of candy and the little dish of nuts, from both of which Avery had eaten.

The medical examiner was not going to let any further possible clue escape him.

Doctor Griffith looked on quietly.

He was amazed at the other's stupidity in not ordering nothing in the room should be touched. To be sure, he had not thought of giving such an order

himself, but that was not his business. He was just an ordinary practitioner, not a member of the police force.

Yet he wished he had thought of it. For as matters stood, what had they to go upon? Whom had they to suspect?

"Mr. Avery was your confidential secretary, Mr. Whitney, was he not?" came the curt sharp tones of Jarvis.

"Yes,—though confidential clerk was the title we used. However, it's much the same thing."

"You reposed full confidence in him?"

"Absolutely. Alan Avery was worthy of all confidence and trust. Incidentally, he was one of my best friends. I shall miss him in more than a business relation."

"You knew him well, then, of course. Would you expect him to commit suicide?"

"If you put it that way, I must say no. I certainly did not expect him to commit suicide. But if it is proved that he did do so, I shall not be altogether surprised."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"It's hard to put into words. But the man's nature was such that he had certain reticences,—perhaps I may say secrets,—that I knew nothing of and that I respected."

"You mean you knew nothing of their purport, their nature?"

"Perhaps I didn't express myself very clearly. But I mean, I know the man did have secrets, important ones to him, but I knew nothing at all of what they were about. I scarcely think they were of sufficient importance to lead him to suicide, yet, as I say, if it is proved that he did kill himself, I shall assume it was because of some of those matters."

"Would that explain his bringing about the tragedy here in Mrs. Vincent's home?"

"I cannot say as to that. As I said, I've not the slightest idea of what his secrets were, and I may even be mistaken in thinking he had any."

"What led you to think he had?"

"Little things he would say,—or, rather, wouldn't say. Sometimes he would start, it seemed, to confide in me, and then would suddenly think better of it, and shut up like a clam. Again, he would go so far as to say, "I believe I'll tell you something—and ask your advice." Then, though I showed every sign of sympathy and willingness to listen, he would say shortly, "well, some other time,—not now." That's why I assume he had secrets that were important to him, at any rate."

"It would seem so. And I can understand a young man having his own troubles. But why not culminate his tragedy at home? Why select a time when visiting at the house of a friend?"

There seemed no possible reply to these queries, so Whitney made none.

"Aside, then, from the fact of his having some secret trouble, he was a rational, normal man?" Jarvis went on, clearly floundering, but anxious to learn what he could of the dead man's character.

"Absolutely that," Whitney assured him. "I've known him many years, and I never knew him to say a word or do a thing that could be construed as other than rational and normal."

"Yet such people take their own lives," Jarvis said, musingly.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Griffith asked, a little impatiently.

"Oh, the regular procedure. I'll call Headquarters, and Young will come up here, with one or two others. They'll take things in charge. It's too bad Mrs. Vincent, and I'm sorry for you, but there's no help for it."

"Can't the ladies retire?" Whitney asked. "They are worn out, and I'll stay here, if I can be of any use."

"No, the ladies must see Young to-night. Good heavens, man! don't you realize that this is perhaps a murder case,—an important one at that. And decidedly mysterious. No one may leave this house, who was here when Avery died. You may go, if you like, Mr. Whitney. You arrived after the doctor, I understand."

"Yes, I did. But if I may, I prefer to stay, for a

time at least. I may be of use to my friends here, in some way."

"Well, do as you choose. The ladies may go to their rooms, may lie down for a rest, if they wish, but they must be ready to be interviewed by Young when he gets here."

"We will be," said Janet, eagerly. "Come Gay, come with me to my room."

The two went off, and Doctor Griffith, his work done, went home.

Doctor Jarvis and the lawyer, sat together in the living-room. They had cigars, and drinks had been provided other than those set aside for the detective's consideration.

"What do you think about it, Doctor Jarvis?" the lawyer asked, though doubting if he would receive a definite reply.

"Too easy," said the other, to his surprise. "Why, man, look at it! Avery comes here. Nobody present but the two women. Avery takes a drink and drops dead. What can be the answer except that one of the women poisoned his drink? You know yourself, that no man would come round to a friend's house and commit his own individual suicide! It would be too unlikely. No, that never happened! So, one of the women killed him."

"Which one?" Whitney spoke coolly, but an angry light burned in his eyes.

"The old one, for choice. I can't seem to tie it on to the little girl."

"And the motive? I can tell you that Avery scarcely knew Mrs. Vincent."

"But you've admitted you don't know Mr. Avery's secrets. Why may not one of them include Mrs. Vincent? Why may he not have known her better than you were aware of? However, I'm not accusing her. But you asked my opinion and you've got it. That's all."

"What poison was used?"

"That's the queer thing! It was a very strong and powerful one,—hydrochlorate of strychnine. Only a very small portion is necessary and it kills instantly."

Whitney looked horrified.

"You're sure it could not have been acute indigestion?"

"Acute fiddlesticks! When two doctors as experienced as Griffith and myself agree on a diagnosis, you may bank on its being true."

"Of course,—of course. But how could a woman get such a poison?"

"How could a man get it? It is not an easy matter for the average citizen to manage, but, granted a murderer, and a clever, determined one, he can get pretty much anything he sets his mind on."

"You say he, yet you suspect a woman."

"Oh, that's the common pronoun. I always say

he. But I do suspect a woman, and how can I help it?"

"May not somebody have poisoned Avery before he came here—with some drug that acts slowly. I've heard there are such."

"There are, but such was not used in this case. No, sir, the poison that killed Mr. Avery is definitely discovered by my colleague and myself. We are ready to swear to its identity. Now, who administered it, and when?"

"It could have been put in the high-ball?"

"It could have been and it was. Even if he took it himself. I mean if he did commit suicide, he did it by dropping the poison into his glass. Oh, if I hadn't been such an ass as to let those glasses get away!"

"That was a surprising oversight on your part, doctor."

"I can't blame myself enough for it! I confess my idiocy, my stupidity, my criminal carelessness! If another doctor had done that, I should have denounced him scathingly. Nor do I condone the offence in the least because it was my own! I feel quite as scornful of my own dereliction as I possibly could of another's."

"Forget it, then, and make the best of what you can yet glean around here."

"Small use. There's nothing to be learned from looking about. It isn't an ordinary crime. I mean,

like a shooting, or a hold-up. There's no one, so far as I can see, who profits financially by the man's death. So, the motive must be a secret one. One which may be discovered, but not by means of clues found lying about."

"You looked through the dead man's pockets?"

"Yes, of course. But found nothing, save for the regulation list of articles that every man carries about with him. Handkerchief, pencil, penknife, wallet, keys, watch,—oh, only the usual list."

"Anything you want me to take charge of?"

"Why, yes,—unless the police prefer to keep them. We'll see. Who are Mr. Avery's heirs?"

"He has a sister and a mother who live in New England. Then there's a brother out West, and that's all."

"Has he made a will?"

"I don't know. I never made one for him, but I have an impression that he made one long ago, before he came to me."

CHAPTER XI

THE TWO WOMEN

YOUNG came in, and though it was late, he seemed as fresh and fit as if it were early morning.

"Well, another development of the Lloyd Converse case," he remarked, as he sat down and lighted a cigar.

"What do you mean by that?" Whitney asked, in surprise.

"Oh, it's all connected. You see, Mr. Whitney, there's a bad man, a real bad man back of it all. It's Lloyd Converse, of course, no need to mince matters."

"And he's responsible for this new tragedy?" Whitney exclaimed, in further amazement.

"Sure he is. How he worked it, I don't know yet. But he managed it somehow."

"To me that seems absurd, Mr. Young," Whitney said, coldly. He never had liked Young, and he thought he had very slight claims to cleverness in his detective work.

But Harrison Whitney was politic above all else, and it quickly occurred to him, that if he were uncivil to Young, it might, in some way, react against the two women in the house, and he was most anxious to shield these from annoyance, so far as he could.

So he added, "Tell us how you reason out a

connection with this murder, if it is murder, and a man in the Tombs?"

"That I have yet to ferret out, Mr. Whitney. But a man as clever as Converse is, can pull wires and set machinery in motion, that might result in the death of a man who is a menace to himself."

"And you think Avery was a menace to Lloyd Converse?"

"I'm sure of it. Avery visited Converse several times."

"But Lloyd banked on him as a detective. He told me so!" Whitney's face was perplexed. He couldn't follow Young's reasoning at all.

"Well, never mind, Mr. Whitney, time will show. I may be all wrong, but I can't help feeling that the two crimes are connected, if, as you say, Avery's death is a crime."

"A crime, all right," Jarvis assured him. "Want to see him?"

"Yes," said Young, curtly, and the three men went into the room where lay the body of Alan Avery.

The clothing of the dead man had been folded and laid on chairs.

"I've thought of one thing," Whitney said, suddenly. "It may or may not have any bearing on the case. But here it is. Avery suffered from indigestion. I don't mean acute, but just ordinary dyspepsia. He carried with him always, some soda mints, which he took after eating. To my knowl-

edge he had some in his pocket,—to-night when he came here."

"Which pocket?" asked Young, turning to the folded clothes.

"This one," and Whitney picked up Avery's waistcoat. Here they are," he added, as he took two small tablets from the pocket. Well, that's all, then. I only wondered, if, in the event of a possible suicide, he had poison tablets instead of harmless soda. But there they are, so my theory falls through."

"Yes, these are soda mints, I'm sure," Young said, sniffing at them. "But we'll have them analyzed, of course. How did they come to be overlooked when his pockets were searched?"

"Carelessness, I suppose," Jarvis said slowly. "Or maybe, Griffith saw them and thought nothing about them. I can't see any importance in the matter."

"No," agreed Young. "Now, there's nothing more to be learned, as I see it. I mean, we have all the facts, it's up to us to read the truth from them."

"You haven't all the facts, since you don't know who killed Avery," Whitney said, bluntly. "If anybody did."

"What's your opinion, Mr. Whitney?" Young asked him.

"I haven't any," the lawyer said, slowly, "except that I don't think you have a shred of real evidence against either of the two ladies of this house. And I can tell you, if you make any false

arrests or throw unfounded suspicion on anybody, I shall take up the case, and you will find yourself in very hot water."

"The ladies are friends of yours?"

"Of course they are. But if they were not, I should do my best to see justice done. Because a man dies mysteriously in the home of an acquaintance, that does not argue that the inmates of that home killed him. Show real evidence, and I will consider it carefully. But mere surmise, vague speculation,—that is not evidence. I admit there's no way to look. I admit it is a most mysterious case, but that is no reason for absurd suspicions. Get your incriminating evidence, and then talk about accusations."

"It's a case of exclusive opportunity for those two ladies you mention," Young said, a little belligerently.

"That phrase, 'exclusive opportunity,' is almost as trite and as often misused as 'cherchez la femme,' which I had expected to hear from you before this. I'm not a detective, but I am a lawyer, and I advise you, partly for your own good, to watch your step."

Whitney was not uncivil, but he was straightforward, and in earnest. He hated to think of Janet again in the limelight of a murder scandal, and Mrs. Vincent, he knew, would have a nervous breakdown if she were drawn deeply into the matter.

Yet what could he do? He could insist upon his belief in the innocence of the two women, but

unless he had some alternative suspect to offer, his insistence would do small good.

"The servants?" he suggested. "Who knows but that one of Mrs. Vincent's servants was an enemy of Avery. At least, it is a possibility, and one you cannot neglect."

"That's true," and Young looked thoughtful. "Well, of course, they'll be questioned at the inquest to-morrow. And now, I'll take a good look round these premises, and then I'll go home for a few hours' sleep before I get busy on the thing to-morrow. Whew! Life is just one darned inquest after another! I can't help feeling Lloyd Converse is in it, but you're right Mr. Whitney, about my voicing suspicions too soon."

"I am," Whitney returned, with dignity. "Also, Mr. Young, I shall ask my own private detective, Mr. Kittinger, to look into this case. He's employed by me on the Converse case, and he can combine his search. Especially, as you surmise the two are connected. I've heard that the simpler and more palpably inexplicable a mystery is, the easier it is to unravel. And, as, to me, Avery's death seems simply unsolvable, I'm hoping Kittinger will see some definite clue at once."

"Clue!" Young fairly snorted. "Where's any clue? There could have been only those high-ball glasses, and they're all washed clean."

"I doubt if they'd been of much help," Whitney

observed. "What could you learn from them, unless in the matter of finger prints,—and those were, of course, the prints of the people we know were present."

"But the matter of the poison!" Young exclaimed. "If we could have found traces of that poison in the high-ball glass, surely that would have been definite evidence against the one who mixed the drink."

"Not necessarily," Whitney still objected. "I've no reason to suspect one of Mrs. Vincent's servants, but still, should one of them be guilty, it was easy enough to put poison into the glass before it was brought in at all."

"How could such a servant be sure the poisoned glass would go to Avery?"

"I don't know," the lawyer returned. "I'm not a detective. I only say there are possibilities there which must not be overlooked. I refuse to believe either of the two ladies of this house poisoned Alan Avery, until I have far more evidence than has appeared so far."

His words were so indubitably true and his argument so logical, that Young was impressed and concluded to look more closely, before he made any direct accusations.

He spent an hour searching about in the living-room, and some of the other rooms in the apartment.

He even went into the kitchen and looked over

the cans and jars in the cupboards there. But, as he had anticipated, he found no hint or trace of poison of any sort. Not even any poisonous exterminating powder or solution.

"Of course not," he said to himself. "Anybody would be a fool to leave such a thing around, if guilty."

Yet Whitney's suggestion of a servant clung to his mind, and the detective determined to grill well the staff of Mrs. Vincent's household.

He argued that the poison must have been in the high-ball, he deduced further that if a servant had placed it there, that person would be only too anxious to wash the glasses as soon as possible, and did so.

So, after a time, Young went home, and Jarvis, too, leaving in charge a special policeman who had been detailed to remain in the apartment.

Whitney hesitated about leaving without a good night to the women, but he hesitated to disturb them by knocking at a door.

However, they heard the others go, and came out to speak to him.

"Oh, what shall we do?" cried Gay, who, as the lawyer had feared, was in a state of nervous fear and terror. "Can't we run away? Can't you get us off secretly, and let us take a train for somewhere, —anywhere, out of town?"

"No, Gay, it wouldn't do," said Janet, decidedly. "Tell her so, Mr. Whitney. Tell her we can't do a

thing like that. And why should we? We are entirely innocent of Mr. Avery's death. The police will of course, find the murderer and for us to run away, would be almost the same as courting suspicion. Isn't that so, Mr. Whitney?"

"Of course it is, Janet. I'm surprised, Lady Gay, you should think of such a thing. I'll do all I can to pull you through this, but don't run your head into a noose by any such fool proceedings!"

"But I can't stand it!" the poor little lady wept bitterly. "I've never had anything like this happen to me, and I can't——"

"Is there any one of your servants who knew Avery—who could have any reason for hating him?"

"Not that I know of," Gay said, her eyes big with wonder. "Of course, you never can tell. I've only three, all women. To be sure, one of them might have been mixed up in a wrong way with Mr. Avery, but I've not the slightest reason to think so."

"Well, you're not certain, you know, so when they question you to-morrow, don't be too positive about the impeccability of your maid's characters."

"But I couldn't let one of them be suspected wrongly!" and Gay's face flamed.

"Better, though, than to be suspected wrongly, yourself," Whitney warned her, gently. "Try to remember, Gay, you are in a bad hole,—a very bad hole. Now, Lord knows, I don't want to suspect

or accuse a servant falsely, but, if it's the only way out for you——"

"Oh, no!" Janet cried, and then, seeing Gay's face fall, she stammered, "well, of course, it would be better than having Gay—no, it wouldn't either! If a lady is suspected wrongly, a lawyer might bring about a triumph of justice, but if a servant were suspected, she'd be railroaded—isn't that what they call it?—straight to prison!"

"Not if I conduct the case, Janet." Whitney spoke very gravely. "I am not an alarmist, but you two must realize the great gravity of the situation. Oh, I know you do," as Gay looked indignant, "but you don't know the danger,—the real danger you are in. Remember, Avery died here, after, or while drinking from a glass that Janet had prepared. I trumped up the idea of a servant, merely to mark time. I can't think they can fix the crime on one of them, but anything that distracts their attention from you two, even for a moment is good business. Now, I'll put Kittinger on the job, and I feel sure he'll get results."

"He didn't do anything for Lloyd," Janet said, musingly. "He didn't get anywhere."

"I know it," Whitney spoke despondently, "and this case is going to be even more inexplicable than Lloyd's. But cheer up, I don't mean to be discouraging. I'm going home now, and I hope you two can

get some sleep. Try to, for you will have a hard day to-morrow."

"At least, let us thank you for being here," Gay said, impulsively. "I'm afraid we're so upset, we've forgotten our manners. And you are a great comfort and support, Harry. I don't know what we'd do without you."

"I wish I could take you both home with me. My sister would welcome you gladly, but I doubt the expediency of such a course."

"No," Janet said, with a wan little smile, "we must face the music here. I don't understand it,—I can't see how anybody could kill Mr. Avery,—let alone why. I can't think of any method or motive. But when I get by myself and think coherently, maybe some inspiration will come to me. There must be some explanation, some rational and positive explanation, and it must be discovered."

"Let us hope it will be discovered at the inquest," Whitney said, and after a few more words of encouragement and cheer, he went home.

The lawyer lived not far away, in a house not unlike the Converse home.

A widower for many years, his sister kept house for him and maintained a comfortable and well-managed home.

As he well knew, she would welcome any guests he might bring to her hospitable care, but he felt it

would be unwise to take Mrs. Vincent and Janet Thurston away from their own home at present.

After the inquest things might be different.

So Whitney walked home, thinking deeply over the moil of circumstances and the personal loss he had himself suffered in the taking off of Alan Avery.

For Avery had been invaluable in his office work. He knew all about Whitney's cases and clients and he could produce data or information with efficiency and speed little short of marvellous.

The lawyer would sadly miss his services, and the thought of training a new confidential clerk was far from pleasing.

But far greater than this inconvenience, loomed up the question of the murder and the trouble that faced Gay Vincent and her young companion.

Systematically, Whitney marshalled his thoughts and wondered what would be the best plan to pursue.

His suggestion of a servant's guilt, he thought was a good thing as far as it went. But he doubted if they could find a scrap of evidence to back up such a theory.

Then it would come back to the two women.

Well, he must get them off,—that was all. He simply must. He had before this proved his ability to take care of dubious cases, now here was a chance to score again.

His exact mode of procedure he could not yet see quite clearly, but he made up his mind to one thing.

Janet must be freed, even at the expense of the other. Granting, for argument's sake, both women were innocent, if one innocent person had to be suspected, it must be Gabrielle Vincent and not Janet Thurston.

Nor was this only because Whitney was in love with the girl.

Had he not been, he told himself, still it would be better, if choice must be made, to have suspicion fall on the older and more experienced woman than on the helpless girl.

He felt that any decent citizen would subscribe to that, and though he had no intention of letting Lady Gay be accused, if such a blow could possibly be averted, yet if choice had to be made,—there was but one choice.

He sighed deeply, and reaching home let himself into the house and went straight to bed.

But the two women in the house of the tragedy had no thought of going to sleep.

They sat in Janet's room, talking, and now and then crying.

Though the most devoted of friends, Janet had long known that Lady Gay had had what is commonly known as a "past."

To the girl's mind, this did not connote anything very dreadful. She knew from her own associations with the older woman, that they were of decidedly different types, almost opposite, in fact.

The girl was straightforward and sincere. Fond

of healthful, out-door sports and frankly disinclined to worry over things or take trifles seriously.

Gabrielle, on the other hand, was devoted to warm rooms, heavy perfumes, dim lights and exotic flowers.

She worried continually, over the most unimportant matters, and was absurdly jubilant over the merest fleeting pleasure.

And now, trouble, deep and grave trouble had come to this pair, and though through their affection they wanted to help one another to bear it, they found it was difficult to get together in their point of view.

"But I must run away, Jannie, dear," Lady Gay insisted. "I can't go to that inquest—you know I can't! I'd die if they questioned me about Alan Avery!"

"Why,—you hadn't any—you didn't know him well, did you?"

Janet looked at her friend with a dawning horror in her eyes. Could it be that Gay knew Avery better than she had pretended? The girl had utmost faith in Gabrielle,—or rather, she wanted to have, but of late, several incidents had made Janet fear there were sides to the other's character that were better hidden.

Resolutely, she had put such thoughts away from her, determinedly, she had resolved to think no ill of the woman who had so long loved and befriended her, but sometimes, it was well-nigh impossible to

shut her eyes to the fact that there was something wrong—somewhere.

Merely straws that showed which way the wind blew, but a downcast look or angry flush on Gay's face had told its own tale.

Yet there was nothing definite, nothing tangible, and Janet turned a deaf ear to the voice of suspicion, and strove to keep her belief in her friend.

And even now, the girl did not really think that Gay knew Avery well, or that there was any more friendship between them than showed on the surface, but a miserable feeling of doubt crept into her heart and would not be evicted.

Gay, however, only laughed, a short, hard laugh, and tossed her pretty head.

"No," she said, "nothing like that! If ever I have a flirtation, it will be with a man of greater charm than poor little Avery boasted."

"He was nice enough," Janet spoke absent-mindedly, almost as if from a sense of duty to speak well of the dead.

"Oh, yes, and you thought he would help you in Lloyd's trouble, didn't you Jannie?"

"Yes,—I did. Say, Gay, could he have been killed by somebody who—who didn't want him to help about Lloyd?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. You know, I think there's a big motive back of George's death. Of course, we all

know Lloyd never killed his brother, and I still have faith to believe Lloyd will be set free yet, but I mean, suppose Avery knew something."

"Avery couldn't have known anything favorable to Lloyd's case that he wouldn't tell you."

"No, I suppose not. But I think George's death was because of some business or political reasons. I don't think it was a personal matter,—the motive, I mean."

"Maybe not. Then, you think the two crimes are connected?"

"I think they must be. I think Alan Avery was a menace, and so—you know, Gay, while I am unfamiliar with all such things, I have a feeling that there is a gang back of it all. You know, a ring or company of bad men."

"Oh, you've been reading penny dreadfuls! George Converse wasn't the kind of man who mixes with gangsters, and thugs."

"Of course not. He was the victim."

"But I mean, he wasn't the sort to be victimized by such people."

"He was a millionaire, they can be victimized by anybody."

"Well, even granting there's something in your theory, Alan Avery wasn't a thug!"

"Of course not! Gay, you are too stupid! He was a victim, also. Don't you see?"

"Oh, that's all tosh. George was killed by some-

body who wanted him dead. I can't think Lloyd did it, any more than you can. But so far, they've found no other way to look. Now, here's Avery. Somebody killed him because he wanted him dead. Well, he is dead, and I'm sorry for he was a nice sort of chap. But, to be honest, I'm far more sorry for myself and you, than I am for Alan Avery. The sort of mind that can see only Lloyd as the murderer of George is the same mind that will fasten itself on this case. And that mind will see no other way to look for a murderer except at you and me. Me, for choice, because I'm older and wickeder."

"Gay, don't talk like that!"

"I have to, Janet. I'm scared to death. I don't see any way out of it all. I wanted to run away,—I still want to,—but I can't, so what can we do?"

"We're both innocent, Gay——"

"Yes, and where does that get us? Lloyd is innocent, and look where he is!"

"Lloyd always says, 'The truth is mighty and must prevail!' And it will!"

"That's a fine quotation, but it doesn't mean a thing! A truer line would be: The truth is helpless, and rarely gets discovered."

"I'm afraid that's only too true, Gay."

Janet's black eyes grew somber and brooding, her lips quivered and her voice shook.

Then, suddenly she raised her head and flung it back in firm decision, as she exclaimed:

"But I won't give in! I will not let the truth be hidden! It *is* mighty and it *shall* prevail! I swear it!"

"Heroics!" and Lady Gay smiled, as at a precocious child. "All very well, dear, if it meant anything. Oh, I know you mean it, yourself, but you can't put it over. You're a bright, smart girl, my dear, but you can't help little old truth to do any prevailing. Not so you'd notice it!"

"Listen to me, Gay. Did you kill Alan Avery?"

"No," said Gabrielle Vincent, turning aside to light a cigarette.

"Do you know who did?"

"No. Why the catechism?"

"Have you the faintest glimmer of an idea which way to look for the criminal?"

"N—no—" but Gay's voice faltered, and her eyes fell before Janet's steady gaze.

CHAPTER XII

QUERIES

THE next morning found Janet more composed, but Gabrielle on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"Don't get up till you feel like it, dear," the girl said, coming into Gay's room.

"I'll never feel like it," Gay returned, wearily. "Jannie, I can't stand it!"

"Oh, come now, it isn't as if either of us were dead. Mr. Avery was a nice man, but after all he wasn't our relative."

"Oh, I'm not grieving over his death, in that way. I mean I can't stand all we have to face,—the publicity, the newspapers, the inquest,—all those horrors! I don't see why I can't go down to Atlantic City."

"Well, you can't, so you may as well make the best of it."

"How callous you are! Don't you care that I'm so broken up?"

"Yes, I care,—but I've so much to do that I can't stay here and nurse you. Leelie will look after you,—I'm going down to see Lloyd."

"But I don't want you to go away, Janet! Reporters will come,—and detectives and police and all sorts of terrible people!"

"Yes, but you needn't see them. Let Leelie tell them you are ill and cannot be disturbed."

Janet kissed Gay good-by, and ran out of the room to escape further expostulation and entreaty.

But before she could leave the house to go to visit Lloyd, Kittinger the detective arrived and asked for an interview.

Janet was rather glad to see him, for she wanted to know just where he stood regarding this new tragedy.

"What a terrible thing, Miss Thurston," he began, but she interrupted him a little brusquely.

"Yes, but please don't waste time in unnecessary platitudes, Mr. Kittinger. There is much to be done, before the inquest this afternoon."

"By whom?" he asked, surprised at her determined air.

"By all of us. This murder of Alan Avery has a deeper motive, a bigger background than might appear. It is not what is sometimes called an open and shut case. Now, the motive must be ferreted out. I don't know whether you can do this or not. If not, then someone else must take a hand."

"Surely there are enough detectives on the job already——"

"Yes, but unless they get results, more must be brought in. Don't be offended, Mr. Kittinger. I am not criticizing your work or your methods, but you haven't done anything yet, and—something must

be done! Something definite, drastic, vital! Now tell me, in a few words, for I am in haste, just what you think about this Avery matter, and what you propose to do about it."

Kittinger looked at her a moment in silence.

He had never before been spoken to like this by a girl! Men had assumed a dictatorial air with him, but for a chit of a girl to order him about was, to put it mildly, disconcerting.

And such a pretty girl. For Janet, stirred to righteous indignation, was a glowing, vivid beauty, her challenging black eyes darting quick glances and a frown hovering on the broad, low brow.

"You set me a difficult task," Kittinger began, but an impatient tap of a little shoe brought him to a realization that she was in no mood for anything but direct statements.

"I can only say, then," he admitted, "that as yet I know little about the new tragedy. How should I? Mr. Whitney called me early this morning. He gave me all the information he could, and then told me to come over here to investigate further. I have just come,—how can I know more than he has told me,—the bare facts of last night's crime."

"That's true, Mr. Kittinger," Janet said, quickly seeing that she had been a little unreasonable. "Well, then, I suppose by investigation, you must mean searching the house—this apartment, that is. I hope you will not find it necessary to disturb Mrs. Vincent,

but of course, you will have to make your search thorough. Now, I will go on my errand, and I hope to get back before you are through here. If not, I wish you'd leave a message or memorandum for me, to say if you've discovered anything of importance."

"Very well, Miss Thurston," but before Kittinger could say more, the girl had gone.

She hailed a taxicab and with all possible speed made her way down to the Tombs, where she was allowed to see Lloyd Converse.

Harrison Whitney had already been there, and had told Lloyd of Avery's death, and the prisoner cursed anew his own helplessness in the matter.

"Whitney was stunned," he told Janet. "Why, I didn't realize how much he cared for Alan Avery as a man, aside from his usefulness as a clerk. But Whitney is all at sea as to who killed him."

"We all are," Janet said. "Now, Lloyd, the situation is desperate. That detective Young is the most insanely suspicious person I ever saw! He is pig-headed and he has the most absurd theories and ideas in the world! And there's nobody to curb his energies but me."

"What do you mean?" Lloyd asked, staring at her.

"Just what I say. Somebody must combat that detective or he'll run Gay and me into jail and hang you."

"Janet!"

"Exactly that. Why, Lloyd, he thinks, or pretends to think, that you killed Avery! That is, that you engineered the murder, and some assistant,—me, probably, actually managed it."

"You're not imagining all this, Jannie, dear?"

"No, I heard him say it,—or, what was practically the same."

"Then, dear, the case, as you say, is desperate." Lloyd's voice was low and very grave. He evinced no excitement, no anger, but he was deeply thoughtful and his clenched hands showed his agony of mind.

"You see," he said, slowly, "I had depended on Avery's own detective work. He was really an astute reasoner, he had some notions about George's death that I am sure pointed in the right direction. Now, Janet, whoever killed Avery is the one, or in league with the one, who killed George."

"That's just the way I see it, Lloyd, and I'm sure it's not one man, back of all this, but a gang,—a ring."

"Perhaps so, but not a political or business ring, if that's what you mean."

"What then?"

"More like a crowd or association of down-and-outers, who resent the fortunes of millionaires and kill them——"

"But nobody robbed George,—what good did it do to kill him?"

"I've been thinking that out, dear, and it seems to me, supposing it is such a gang, that they mean to

continue their work by threats to other rich men of a fate like George's, unless they fork over a lot of money."

"Blackmail?"

"Not quite that, more like a big, organized system of hold-ups. For all I know, they may have been after George for money,—big money, you know,—and when he refused, he was killed."

"And the red-headed girl?"

"May have been one of their agents. Those underworld people have women workers as well as men."

"I daresay all you've said is the true solution, Lloyd. Now, what about Avery?"

"He may have been doing his detective work, for me, you know, and he may have found out more than they wanted him to know. And so the gangsters, scenting danger, may have killed him, to prevent his further discoveries."

"But why at our house?"

"That's part of the diabolical plot, as I see it. They meant to bring you and Mrs. Vincent into their toils, and either get you suspected, or blackmail you in some way."

"But how could they kill Avery when he was alone with us?"

"That isn't obvious, I admit. But they are clever enough to manage it. It may be one of Mrs. Vincent's servants is in league with them. Or a poisoned

cigarette could have been somehow introduced into Avery's case. Oh, there are ways that a cunning villain's brain could conceive and carry out, that would never even occur to us. But, Janet, here I am, unable to do a thing."

"That's just it, Lloyd. Now, you are to think what to do, and I will do it. I can do anything you suggest, and I will."

"You're a brave little person, Jannie, dearest, and I only wish I could give you definite directions and have you carry them out. But the thing is not so simple as that, and, to be honest, I don't know anything that you can possibly do to help."

"But what would you do, Lloyd, if you were out?"

"I'd follow up a few lines of investigation that have only lately come into my head. But they're not things that you can do, dearest,—I only wish they were."

"There's no use my insisting, then. I know, if you thought I could help in those ways, you'd tell me so. Well, then, are we to submit tamely and with no resistance? Isn't the truth mighty? Shall it not prevail? Oh, Lloyd!"

She flung herself into his arms, regardless of the guard, who discreetly turned his back.

"Dear," Lloyd said, after he had comforted her a little, "you go back home, and you attend the inquest this afternoon. Of course, you'll have to be

present, but, I mean, take especial notice of everything that is said. Take accurate notice of each witness as to his attitude, demeanor, facial expression,—all such things. So that you can give me a clear account of it all. They won't arrest you or Lady Gay, either. They'll likely bring in an open verdict,—but they may move an adjournment. I don't see how they can avoid that, anyhow. But be very non-committal, yourself. Answer the questions put to you in as few words as possible. Be courteous, but say absolutely nothing except the briefest reply to their questions. Tell Mrs. Vincent to do this, too, and then you come here to-morrow, and tell me everything that transpired. If the notions I have behind my eyes are at all the right ones, your report will help me greatly. Go now, dear, and let me see you to-morrow morning."

So Janet went away, less despondent than when she came, but still heavy of heart.

And once outside, and removed from the comforting presence of Lloyd, she gave way to gravest doubts and fears.

But soon a reaction set in, and her natural bravery came again to the fore. She realized that if anything could be done, it would be only by her own efforts.

Lady Gay was a broken reed when it came to helpful support. Mr. Whitney was sympathetic and

willing, but Janet shrank from asking him for assistance.

Partly because she felt sure he would do all he could, without being asked, but also, because she was finding out that he was growing more and more fond of her, and she shrank from giving him anything that might seem like even tacit encouragement.

He had said no word to her, of his admiration or affection, but her heart told her of his desire and she shunned him whenever possible.

As to Kittinger, Janet had little faith in his powers. Though unversed in the ways and means of detectives, she felt that his methods were vague and inefficient, and that he was not the one to tackle the great problem that confronted them.

And who else was there? Young, the police detective, though able and energetic, was so positively committed to his own theories and beliefs that it seemed as if no evidence or testimony could ever change him.

And Janet had no men friends of years and experience. Her friends were all young people, clever and intellectual enough, but without the knowledge and judgment necessary for the detection of crime.

She racked her brain to think of someone who could advise or help her, for she began to feel that her own unaided efforts would amount to simply nothing.

She did, at last, think of an old judge, a friend

of her mother, who lived in Boston, and she concluded to write him a short letter before the inquest began.

Reaching home, she did this, and dropped her note in the mail chute in the hall of their apartment house without any one being the wiser.

Then, after taking off her hat and coat, she went to Gay's room, presenting to her friend a composed demeanor and even smiling face.

She found that volatile little lady, also in better spirits, and anxiously selecting an appropriate costume to wear at the inquest.

A dark blue georgette was the final choice, and as she dressed, she listened to Janet's account of her morning.

"Mr. Kittinger has gone," Gay informed, "but he asked me to say to you that he found a picture of Alan Avery in the desk in the living-room. Did you put it there, Janet?"

"Mercy, no! I don't believe he found one there, either! Unless you owned it."

"Not I!" Lady Gay's laugh rippled out. "You can't pin a flirtation with that man on me, my dear."

"Then somebody planted it there," Janet thought to herself, her mind still on the criminal "gang" which she felt sure was back of all the tragedy.

"What do you know about the servants, Gay?" she began, but before a reply came, luncheon was announced, and the subject perforce dropped.

The inquest was held before a very small group of spectators.

Doctor Jarvis seemed ill at ease, and his manner affected others present, so that the occasion was a painful one all round.

The first witness, of course, was Doctor Griffith, who merely testified to being called to the house by a maid servant.

"You knew Mr. Avery in life?" asked the medical examiner.

"I have met him once or twice, casually. I cannot claim much acquaintance."

"But you knew the dead man to be Alan Avery?"

"Oh, yes, I knew him well enough to recognize him."

"To what cause do you ascribe his sudden death?"

"To the fact that he had swallowed poison."

"Of what nature?"

"It was strychnine hydrochlorate."

"The effect of that poison is always fatal?"

"Invariably and immediately."

Of course, Doctor Jarvis knew as much as or more about poison that Griffith did, but the questions were necessary for the benefit of the jury.

"Do you assume the poison was taken by the man with suicidal intent?"

"There is no reason that I know of, to assume that, but it may be so."

"Was the poison taken by itself, or in some food or drink?"

"That cannot be positively determined, because the autopsy disclosed the presence of recently taken food and drink as well as the poison itself."

"What was the nature of the food?"

"The partially digested dinner and some more lately eaten nuts and candy."

"But it is certain that the poison was taken into the stomach and that in a very short time it caused death?"

"In less than a minute, I should say."

"Mr. Avery was in a healthy condition otherwise?"

"So far as I could learn from my examination."

"Then we must conclude that death was consequent upon poison administered by himself or by another hand, practically at the time of his death?"

"That is correct."

Doctor Griffith was dismissed and Mrs. Vincent was called next.

By this time, Lady Gay had recovered her poise if not her good spirits.

Also, she had been instructed by Janet to follow Lloyd's advice in the matter of being non-committal in her responses.

As women often do, she exaggerated the directions, and assumed a careless, indifferent air, which did not help along her cause.

"You are the lessee of this apartment?" Jarvis asked politely enough.

"You know I am," Lady Gay returned, with a flippant nod of her head.

"And Mr. Avery was a caller here last evening?"

"Yes."

"He was a frequent caller here?"

"No."

"An occasional caller?"

"Yes."

Her replies were adequate, but their crisp delivery rather nettled the examiner and he grew a bit testy.

"Well, why did he come here last evening?"

"He came to call."

"On you?"

"Yes."

"On Miss Thurston as well?"

"Yes."

"He came, then, on no special errand?"

"No."

"He didn't come to consult with you about the Converse case?"

"Perhaps he did."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"Why did he want to discuss that with you?"

"He knew of the interest Miss Thurston and I felt in the matter."

"Was Mr. Avery acting as an investigator?"

"Not officially."

"Unofficially, then?"

"As a friend of Mr. Lloyd Converse, he was interested in running down the murderer of his brother."

"Mr. Avery was not with you at dinner?"

"No."

"But came after dinner?"

"Yes."

The dialogue was so monotonous as to be almost laughable, but Doctor Jarvis was not easily discomposed.

"And you had high-balls served at once?" he went on.

"Yes."

"Is that your custom?"

"I cannot see how it affects the subject in hand, but I will say that I often have drinks served to my men callers who care for them."

"And you had one yourself?"

"Yes."

"You drank from the same bottles as Mr. Avery was served from?"

"The same."

"Who poured the liquor?"

"The time that it killed him?"

"Yes."

"Miss Thurston did. The first time, Mr. Avery did."

"In neither case then, you poured it?"

"No."

Lady Gay was quiet and dignified. If she resented any implication in the examiner's words, she didn't show her feelings by word or look.

Nor did her statement as to who poured out the drinks in any way seem to accuse any one of wrong intent. She merely told her facts in a calm, dispassionate way.

"Now, Mrs. Vincent, since Mr. Avery drank the whisky and then fell dead, it must be that the whisky was poisoned."

"I do not see how it could have been."

"But as we have had the rest of the liquor in the bottle examined and found it to be without trace of poison, it seems to stand to reason that only the portion poured in Mr. Avery's glass was poisoned."

"Yes?" said Gay, with a slightly interrogative accent.

"Can you explain such a condition?"

"No."

"Can you think that there was poison placed in your candy or nuts?"

"No."

"Then, Mrs. Vincent, you have no idea, no opinion, as to how or by whom poison was given to

Alan Avery in your home,—assuming that it was not his own act?"

"I have no idea and no opinion as to that."

"You knew Mr. Avery well?"

Gay paled a little, but spoke with her usual calm:

"Not very well."

"How well?"

"That is a difficult question to answer meticulously. Well enough to expect him to call in the evening, now and then."

"Well enough to write him a most friendly note, signed 'Your Little Lady'?"

"Certainly not!"

"Yet such a note has been found in a private drawer of his desk, and is said to be in your handwriting."

"I think you must be mistaken."

"Do you care to look at the note?"

"Yes."

He handed a folded paper to Gay, who opened it and read with great deliberation.

Then she returned it to him, with an indifferent gesture, and said:

"I never wrote that note. It is a made-up story, in an attempt to injure me."

"You deny writing it?"

"I certainly do."

"You acknowledge it looks like your writing?"

"It looks like an imitation of my writing."

"Will you express an opinion, Miss Thurston, as to whether this is or is not Mrs. Vincent's penmanship?"

He passed the letter to Janet, who took it, gave one glance at it, and said: "That is my writing. I wrote that note myself."

CHAPTER XIII

MARTHA'S STORY

"THIS is your writing, Miss Thurston?" the examiner spoke with an air of incredulity.

"Yes," and Janet handed back the note as a thing of no consequence.

"Then your writing is extraordinarily like that of Mrs. Vincent."

Janet made no response, determined to speak no more than was absolutely necessary.

Her silence nettled Jarvis, and he said, curtly, "Do you two write alike on purpose?"

"Yes," Janet told him.

"Why?"

"Because then I can sometimes answer notes or invitations for Mrs. Vincent in her own name."

"I see. She trained you to write like her, so she could pretend she wrote the notes herself."

Again Janet was silent, and Jarvis saw that only a direct question would win a reply.

"Do you think that an honorable procedure?"

Janet shrugged her shoulders.

"As it only affected her formal and social correspondence, its dishonorable aspect never occurred to me."

"Then, you assert you wrote this note to Mr. Avery?"

"Yes," Janet returned.

"In that case, you can tell me what is in the note."

He noticed she didn't read it, and he thought he had caught her in a trap.

But she only said, indifferently, "I've no recollection of what is in that particular note."

"Meaning that you often wrote to Mr. Avery?"

"Occasionally," she said, but her voice shook a little.

As a matter of fact, Janet had never written to Avery in her life. Moreover, she saw at once that the note had been written by Gabrielle and not by herself.

What she had told about their similar penmanship was quite true. Gay had asked her to copy her own hand, as the indolence of the older woman made her glad to have help in her social correspondence and often, Janet could write and sign personal notes, if the writing were sufficiently similar.

Practice and a natural bent for copying had made the girl proficient, but she had done little more than to use her powers on formal invitations and such matters. Now and then, Gay would lazily lie on a sofa and dictate a letter to a friend or acquaintance, and as it was so like her own writing she bade Janet sign it Gay or Gabrielle, but neither of them had taken the thing seriously.

Of course, though, either of them could tell at

a glance which one had done the writing, and now, Janet saw that the note the examiner held had been written by Gay, beyond all doubt.

But she also saw the gathering cloud of fear, even terror, on Gay's expressive face, and she quickly determined to assume the brunt of this new development.

"This note is in a vein that is—er—a bit affectionate. Had you such feelings toward Mr. Avery?"

Janet felt the ground giving way beneath her feet. How could Gay have written to Avery a note that could be called affectionate? It was all too mysterious!

"Not really," Janet said, managing to give a coquettish smile. "It was doubtless written in jest. May I see it?"

The note was handed to her, and she read:

"Dear Man; You were cold toward me last night, and I am still shivering of heart at the recollection. Please let me see you soon again, and tell me you didn't mean to hurt me so. You are very dear to me, and I am, as always,—Your Little Lady."

Janet saw at once that it was in Gay's writing, that it was on Gay's own paper, though without engraved monogram or address, and that it even bore a faint scent of Gay's favorite perfume. Also, it had a slight odor of tobacco, and the girl was forced to the conclusion that it was a note of Gabrielle's, and that she must have been on affectionate terms with Avery to have written thus to him.

But she bravely held her ground, and tried a new argument.

"No," she said, looking the examiner squarely in the face, "I did not write that note, and Mrs. Vincent did not either. It is a forgery. That large, slanted writing is not difficult to imitate, and somebody has done it with intent to incriminate Mrs. Vincent or myself. But neither of us knew Mr. Avery, save as a friendly acquaintance. He came here last night solely to discuss the affairs of Mr. Lloyd Converse, who is my fiancé."

Her simple straightforward manner, and her clear, steady voice carried conviction to many who heard her, and had it not been for Gay's very audible sigh of relief and suddenly pleased expression, Janet could have put it over.

But Lady Gay's face was an open book on which her emotions were all too plainly written.

She had sat, her eyes staring, her lips tensely drawn and her fingers twisting nervously, while Janet read the letter.

Then, when the girl calmly made her statement, and when her hearers were quite evidently inclined to believe her, Gabrielle Vincent upset the whole scheme by a relaxing sigh and a happy little smile, as she settled back in her chair, and beamed at Janet.

But the examiner, whose attention was concentrated on his witness, did not see this, and continued, in a nonplussed manner:

"You feel sure this is a forgery, Miss Thurston?"

"I am sure of it," Janet asserted, ready and willing to lie out of this situation, if by so doing she could save Gay trouble or embarrassment.

What it all really meant, Janet couldn't imagine, for she was sure Gay had had no flirtation with Alan Avery.

That is, nearly sure, for Janet was never quite sure where the erratic Lady Gay was concerned. But that it was Gay's own writing, she was positive, and so, was ready to stand by her friend to the last ditch.

"This note was found in the drawer of Mr. Avery's desk, along with other notes and letters of a personal nature. It does not seem likely any one would have forged it."

But this statement drew no response from the alert girl before him.

Janet was quite alive to the gravity of the situation. If Gay were secretly in love with Avery or he with her, suspicion would quickly attach itself to the "Little Lady."

"Also," the inexorable voice went on, "there has been found a photograph of Mr. Avery in the desk in this room. Is it your property, Miss Thurston?"

Jarvis held up the picture that Kittinger had unearthed, and Janet hesitated a moment. She was getting in a terrible tangle, but her one thought was to do her best for Gay.

"No," she said, coldly, "nor is it Mrs. Vincent's property. That like the note to Mr. Avery, is faked, —planted, I believe you call it. Some one is trying to involve us in this mystery of Mr. Avery's death. Someone both powerful and wicked. But it is not true that we are guilty in any way, as principals or as accessories. There is a sinister influence at work, and you must find it! The truth is mighty and must prevail!"

Janet was not at all theatrical, but her voice rang out as she pronounced her favorite maxim, and it had weight with the examiner. He began to wonder if there was some deep, dark plot, of which he knew nothing, that was entangling two innocent women.

Then he caught sight of the expression on the face of one of the servants and concluded to get another angle on the case.

The inquest was necessarily informal, and there were practically no witnesses to be questioned save the members of the household.

So he called the servant he had noticed, who, to his mind, looked both knowing and intelligent.

"What is your name?" he began, as he indicated a chair for her.

"Martha, sir."

"What is your position in this house?"

"I am the waitress."

"You saw Mr. Avery here last night?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

It was plain to be seen the girl was fairly bursting

with a sense of importance, and Jarvis assumed a sterner manner to keep her in check.

"Be careful with your replies. State only facts that you know, and as briefly as possible. When did you see him?"

"At first, when I answered his ring at the door, and let him in, and later, when Mrs. Vincent told me to bring in the drinks."

"When Mr. Avery came in how did the ladies greet him? As an old friend?"

"Why,—I don't know. But they was all sorta sad-like. And downcast looking. They began right away to talk about Mr. Converse, the gentleman that's in jail."

"What did they say about him?"

"I don't know, sir. I only showed Mr. Avery into the room, then I went back to the pantry."

"Very well. Then, later, you came in with a tray of——"

"Yes, sir. Ginger ale and soda water and Scotch whisky."

"Who poured out the glasses?"

"Mr. Avery, sir. I saw to it that everything was all right on the tray, and then I went away."

"And returned?"

"When Mrs. Vincent rang for me. She rang the bell hard, sorta wild like, and I come a runnin'! And she says, 'Call the doctor, quick! Telephone for Doctor Griffith!' And I did. I used the telephone in the hall, and I got the number right away."

"And when you were telephoning, where were the ladies?"

"Mrs. Vincent was with the sick man, sir, and Miss Janet she ran to her bedroom to get the smelling salts. They thought the gentleman had an attack of indigestion."

"Mrs. Vincent was alone with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did she say? Did she speak to him?"

"I—I was telephoning, sir. How could I hear?"

"You did hear! Your frightened face now proves that you heard. What did she say?"

"I—I don't know—oh, I don't know!"

The girl's obvious distress gave the lie to her words, and Jarvis sternly commanded her to tell what she had heard.

Between sobs, the girl stammered out: "She said, —it sounded like—'Now you can't tell about Jannie and her beads, young man!' but maybe I didn't hear it right."

"You heard all right. But are you sure you remember correctly? Sure those are the words Mrs. Vincent used?"

The worst over, Martha seemed to regain her poise a little. Wiping her streaming eyes, she asservated:

"Yes, sir, that's just what she said. I heard her plain as plain, for I was listening for the telephone girl. And of course, I remember,—them words is burned into my brain!"

Without intending to be dramatic, Martha's solemn words were impressive, and an unbiased listener could not doubt their truth.

But what an accusation! It meant, it must mean, that, whether or not, instrumental at bringing it about, Gay Vincent was relieved at the death of Alan Avery!

Clearly, she had dreaded his knowledge of the episode of Janet's beads and clearly, too, there must be some guilty evidence depending on the truth about those beads!

Jarvis turned to Gay.

"Will you explain, Mrs. Vincent," he said, "what you meant by the speech your maid declares you uttered?"

"Oh, I never said any such thing!" she exclaimed, trying to speak airily, and not entirely succeeding. "Martha is an imaginative sort, and often thinks she hears what she does not hear. Now, I don't know what exclamations I may have made in my excitement at Mr. Avery's sudden illness, but I'm sure I never said that."

It was but recently that Jarvis had got himself into a scrape because he had put too great faith in a servant's repetition of an overheard speech.

He hesitated to commit a similar indiscretion now, and yet, the maid had seemed positive of her facts, though reluctant to tell them.

And so, feeling that there was much to be investigated, much to be learned before further definite

steps could be taken, Jarvis declared the inquest adjourned.

After the adjournment, most of the audience dispersed to their homes. Not many had attended, as the affair was not greatly noised abroad, but the jury who had been hastily collected had some friends or relatives who had a morbid desire to be present.

The two detectives, Young and Kittinger tarried for a time, and Lawyer Whitney remained to see if he could be of service.

These three confabbed by themselves, as the two women fled to their rooms as soon as permitted.

"Shadow the girl," Young broke out, impetuously, "she's a born liar. She would make up anything to help her friend! And don't let her hobnob with Converse so much. Those two are at the bottom of this whole business."

"No, Mr. Young," Whitney said, with his most legal air, "you've no right to make such statements when you've no proof and no evidence that what you say is true. I don't believe for a minute that Miss Thurston is in any way implicated in the death of Avery, nor do I think she is in the Converse tragedy."

"I've lately learned that her beads were found on the scene of the crime."

"But that might be explained in many an innocent way. Suppose they broke, while she was out somewhere with Lloyd Converse. Suppose he put them in his pocket for safe keeping, and later, when

giving them to her, overlooked one or two. Then, they could easily be dropped in his brother's room."

"You're as clever as the girl, Mr. Whitney, in imagining things. If all that happened as you dope it out, it isn't any too likely that Lloyd would accidentally drop the beads just in the place and just at the time when they would be evidence against the girl. No, sir, Miss Thurston was in George Converse's room and dropped her beads there. Whether it was the night he was killed or not, we don't know. But don't think we've shelved that Converse matter. Nothing like that! We're working hard to find that red-haired girl."

"That's the thing to do," Whitney approved. "Get her, and you've got something to work on—somewhere to look."

"I'm interested in that red-haired mystery girl, too," Kittinger said, "but I doubt our ever finding her. I'm not sure, either, that the policeman's story of her was accurate. Not that he meant to mislead, but he really took little notice of her, and he may have made up, more or less."

"We're doing all we can to find her," reiterated Young, "but there's so little to go on. Lloyd Converse knows practically nothing about his brother's friends,—and he wouldn't tell if he did."

"Not to save his own skin?" asked Kittinger.

"I'm not sure he would. He's a fanatic about loyalty and such things, and he has an unquenchable

optimism,—a sort of truth is mighty and must prevail attitude that is admirable but not very useful."

"Truth won't prevail without a lot of help," sagely observed Whitney. "Now, Kit, you've two cases to work on. That ought to be easier in some ways, than one. If you can connect the two, do so, but don't insist on making them interdependent. They may be and they may not."

"You are convinced that Mrs. Vincent knew Avery better than she pretends she did, aren't you, Mr. Whitney?" Young asked.

"It certainly seems so. When you find his picture here, and her note in his desk, it looks that way."

"You're sure it is her note?"

"Hers or Miss Thurston's. They do write just alike, I know, for I am Mrs. Vincent's lawyer, you know, and I've had notes signed with her name, that I am pretty well certain the girl wrote. It's always been a harmless enough deception, until this crucial instance came up. But I think an expert can easily tell who wrote that note to Avery. And, personally, I think it was Mrs. Vincent. For Janet is engaged to Lloyd Converse, you know. And, too, the ending of the missive suggests Lady Gay, rather than Miss Thurston. But it's just like the girl to take it on herself. She's a loyal friend if there ever was one, and she would willingly perjure herself for another, whom she loved."

"For Converse, then?"

"Surely. Though I can't see her opportunity to do that."

"Nor I," Kittinger agreed. "Well, me for the servants. I think there's more to be gleaned in that field."

"Go ahead, Kit," Whitney said, "but, go slowly. Sometimes, if a servant has a grievance, it colors a statement. And, I think that Martha person was altogether too ready and willing to repeat a speech that was certainly damning to Lady Gay. Get her to tell that again, and note if she says it the same way. Pin her down, make her swear to it, and see if she doesn't hedge. I can't see Mrs. Vincent taking that attitude. She may have cared for Avery herself, but I don't see how she could think he was about to incriminate Janet Thurston in that moil about the beads."

"What do you think about the beads, Mr. Whitney?" This from Young.

"I doubt if they mean a thing. In the first place, they may not be Miss Thurston's beads at all."

"But they are exactly like hers."

"Beads are made by the hundreds of thousands. The red-haired girl may have worn the same pattern as Miss Thurston did."

"Too much of a coincidence," Young shook his head. "Well, I'll get along. Nothing more to be learned here just now."

But Kittinger thought there was, and he went at once to the pantry door and asked for Martha.

She came readily and though uncommunicative, answered the questions he put to her.

"Tell me again," Kittinger said, "of Mrs. Vincent's exclamation, when she was alone with Mr. Avery's dead body, and thought she was not overheard."

"Just as I told you. She said, 'You bet you won't tell now, Mister, about Jannie and her beads!' That's what she said."

"That isn't just as you expressed it before."

"Laws, man, I can't say the exact words! Only that was the sense of what she yawped out."

"She didn't say 'you bet,' did she?"

"Dunno's she did. But she said 'sure,' or—well, anyway, she spoke glad and excited like—not glad that the man was dead, but glad that he couldn't blab on Miss Janet."

"Did Mr. Avery dislike Miss Thurston?"

"Not's I know on. But he was a nosey piece, and he—oh, laws, I don't know anythin' about their affairs here. I wisht you wouldn't pester me so!"

"There, there, Martha, don't get huffy. I don't want to pester you. But I do want to find out which of the ladies here Mr. Avery was interested in."

"Lovin', you mean? Not either of 'em. He wasn't no beau of Mrs. Vincent nor Miss Janet neither."

"Why did he come here?"

"To talk about the Converse murder. He was friendly enough, but lovery,—no."

"Well, then, who put the poison in his whisky, and why?"

"Mr. Kittinger, sir," and Martha spoke very seriously now, "no livin' human bein' coulda put poison in Mr. Avery's drink and him not seen it."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I was in the hall. I wasn't listenin' in, I hadn't any reason to; I didn't care what they was a sayin',—but I was hopin' he'd go away early, so's I could go out. I knew if he left the place in time, I could go to the ten o'clock show. And if he didn't, I couldn't. So, I was hoverin' and I couldn't help seeing what was goin' on. And Miss Janet, she fixed two high-balls, I saw her,—just two mod'rate pours o' whisky, and a dash o' ginger ale. And she couldn't have put poison in his, if she'd wanted to, and the blessed lamb wouldn't do it, anyway!"

"You saw her plainly?"

"Yes, sir, 'cause I was wonderin' if maybe that was a sorta good-night drink and the gentleman would be goin'."

"Yes, then go on. You saw him fall over?"

"I did, sir, and I was that scared, I slipped back in the pantry, and I was there when Mrs. Vincent rang."

"Why didn't you tell all this at the inquest?"

"Nobody asked me, and they said to just answer questions and nothin' else."

"Go on, Martha. And then you answered the bell?"

"Yes, sir. And Mrs. Vincent hollered for me to ring up the doctor, and Miss Janet she ran to her room for smellin' salts."

"And then,—how could you hear Mrs. Vincent's speech, if you were telephoning?"

"It was while I was waitin' to get the call. She didn't speak loud, neither, but the place was still as death, an' I couldn't help hearing her say, 'Well, Mr. Man, you can't peach on the girl now!' That's what she said."

"You tell it different, every time, Martha."

"Do I? Well, I'm not much for rememberin' exact words, but I know the gist like of what she said."

"She seemed relieved then, that the man was dead?"

"I wouldn't say that,—but she musta known he was dead,—and so——"

Martha's voice trailed away to silence, but Kittinger intuitively sensed the rest of her remark, had she made it, would have been,—and so she musta killed him.

CHAPTER XIV

A CONFAB

TRUE to her promise, Janet went to see Lloyd the next day, and reported faithfully the proceedings at the inquest.

He listened carefully, with his calm broken now and then by an impetuous exclamation of amazement or dismay.

"Then, as I see it," he said, when she finished, "whoever killed George and killed Avery is trying to implicate you and Mrs. Vincent in the affair. For I don't think Avery died at your house by a coincidence. And yet, too, it might have been. Suppose his murderer put the poison in one of his cigarettes, —did he smoke from his own cigarette case?"

"Y—yes, I think he did; yet he may have taken one of ours, too. I don't remember that."

"Well, I can't seem to see any reason for wanting to drag you and Lady Gay in, but either that is the case, or Avery died there by accident. I mean, it was an accident that it happened there. His death was no accident. Janet, there's a big motive back of all this."

"I know it, Lloyd, and I can't link the two crimes. I know the detectives think they are connected, but I can't see how or why."

"But you say there was a photograph of Avery

found in your living-room, that was not yours or Gay's. Also, a note to him, found in his belongings that seemed to be written by one of you two women. Now, that must be the work of the criminals, and what could it have been done for, except to incriminate you—either one or both! And, if so, then the death of the victim in your home was intentional and was brought about by fiendish ingenuity."

"There are always the servants to be considered."

"Yes, it would seem as if there must be a confederate in the household. Yet it might have been done by some messenger, say an emissary in the guise of a telegraph boy or florist's delivery, or, even a woman book agent, or something. Have you had any such, lately?"

"Oh, of course, there are such people coming all the time. What with Gay's affairs and my own, as well as the housekeeping matters, the doorbell rings continually. We have a rule not to leave a stranger alone in the living-room, but it is a rule quite often broken, for Martha is careless and she assumes that there is no danger of thievery as there's no money about. But, as you say, some agent from the criminal gang could easily come, with a box of flowers or something to sell, and while waiting for Gay or me, could put the photograph into the desk."

"Then that was the way of it!" Lloyd exclaimed, "unless—Janet, you have no doubts of Mrs. Vincent——"

"No!" cried the girl, positively. "I haven't,

—I won't have any doubts of her! She is my dearest friend and life-long benefactor. She may be frivolous and flirtatious, but I know most of her goings on, and while they're, well, frisky, at times, she has no real affairs that I don't know about, and Alan Avery was nothing to her. She never had his picture or wrote him an affectionate note, anymore than I did!"

"You saw the note?"

"Yes," and Janet's face clouded.

"Well, then how do you explain it?"

"I can't, Lloyd, except to say that it is merely a clever forgery of our writing. We write alike, and it is not a hard hand to imitate."

"Then, if it is a forgery, an expert can easily detect that. You must have that done, Janet. But if it is a forgery, it only goes to prove that the people who are drawing you and Gay into a very serious predicament, are both determined and persistent. They are ready to go to any lengths to prove that one or both of you were far more intimate with Avery than you pretend."

"But why, Lloyd? I can't see why."

"Nor I,—that is, not exactly. It's a tangled web, and there seems to be no one to unravel it."

He sighed deeply, but a smile came into his eyes as he added:

"Still, the truth is mighty and must prevail."

"Everybody says that's not so," the girl re-

turned, wistfully trying to look brave. "They say Truth is helpless and can't speak for herself."

"Then we must get somebody to speak for her. Of course, Janet, Whitney is our standby and our rock of defense. But he isn't a magician. Just think, George was one of his best clients and best friends. Avery was his valued assistant, and friend, too. Here they are, both dead, and he is powerless to avenge their murders!"

"His detective hasn't got anywhere."

"Not yet, but I trust he will. You can't ferret out these mysteries in a minute, you know."

"But I don't think Kittinger is clever. And as for Young, he's obstinate and pig-headed. I wish I were a man, I'd be a detective!"

"And you'd be a good one, dear. But a woman can't do work of that sort."

"Apparently not, for goodness knows I've tried! I've racked my brain to think of a way to find the red-haired girl! But I can't get a clue. Of course she was either a friend of George's, or else, she was one of the gang who are back of all this."

"Or both."

"Yes, if she was one of the gang, a sort of decoy, she must have been George's friend, too."

"Yes, she achieved his friendship, somehow, and then she went to the house that night and shot him, at the orders of the gang."

"That's pretty much the way I see it, but where does Avery come in?"

"I'm thinking he began to find out things, and they had to put him out of the way. I always said he had detective talent, and I think he had made discoveries that meant danger to the criminals, and so he had to go."

"And they manœuvered to get him killed at our house?"

"I'm not sure of that,—it may not have been intentional."

"But the photograph and the note,—if they were planted, it shows prearrangement——"

"It sure does! You're a little sleuth, Janet! Oh, if only I were free and we could work this thing out together!"

"We will work it out together, dear. The truth shall prevail! But we're neither of us big enough to swing the job. Kittinger isn't, either. Nor Young. These people, whether they're a common, underworld gang, or a ring of gentleman blackmailers, or whatever they are, must be found and brought to book, and I doubt if any but the most wise and experienced detective could bring that about. And so, Lloyd, I wish you'd get one. Will you?"

"I'd be glad to, dear, but I don't know of any. And I can't ask Whitney to discard his man——"

"A great detective would be expensive, Lloyd."

"No matter, if he could succeed. Why, do you know of one? I'll gladly pay his fees."

"I don't, of course. But I'll tell you what I've done, and I do hope you'll approve. I wrote to

Judge Payne, an old friend of ours in Boston. And I just asked his advice. I'm sure he'll help us."

"That's fine, Janet. I'm glad you wrote. I hope to Heaven, he'll know of a real Sherlock, who will come to our aid at once. George's death was bad enough, but Avery's seems even more of a menace. I'm afraid,—oh, darling, I'm afraid they'll harm you!"

"Not unless I do more and better detective work than I've accomplished yet."

The girl tried to smile but it was a poor attempt, and she burst into tears instead.

Converse tried to comfort her, but he, too, had begun to feel despair.

"Brace up, darling," he begged. "We'll not give up hope. We'll not give up faith in the might of truth. Even if that is an old copy-book maxim, it's the speech of some wise and good man, and we'll verify it."

And then the time was up and Janet had to go.

But this time she went away from her lover with renewed determination and fresh steadfastness of purpose.

She hoped for help from her old friend, but meantime, she resolved to do something on her own account.

She had rather avoided Lawyer Whitney, but she began to think he was almost the only port in a storm and she turned her way to his office.

She readily gained admittance and the kindly

courtesy of his reception made her glad she had come.

"I thought I'd like a talk with you," she began, a little uncertainly.

"Why not?" he responded. "Surely I am the one for you to consult with. You may some day be my client." He stopped suddenly, realizing what occurrence would make her his client! It would have to be the death of Lloyd Converse and her inheritance of his estate. And that was not a subject to touch upon!

"You see, I am very mercenary," he said, in answer to her surprised glance. "I look on every caller as a possible client, now or in the future. Now let's discuss the matter that I'm sure is uppermost in both our hearts."

She gave him a grateful nod, as she settled herself in the comfortable chair he placed for her, and looked about the pleasant private office.

"First, be assured," he said, gently, "that I have your interests deeply at heart, as well as those of Lloyd Converse. And while I am overcome with grief at the death of two of my friends, even greater is my feeling of righteous wrath and my determination to avenge these monstrous crimes."

"Then, Mr. Whitney," Janet came straight to the point, "do you think you have chosen the best man for your purpose, in putting Mr. Kittinger on the case?"

"Why, yes," he said, looking at her in amazement. "Perhaps you're not up in these matters, but

Kittinger is one of the ablest and most capable private detectives in the country. He has all sorts of records, indeed, he has rarely, if ever, failed to solve his problems."

"Then, I suppose it is all right. But it seems to me as if he just hadn't got anywhere at all."

"But he hasn't had time. He is working, I know, steadily, and the results are bound to come."

"Have you any idea who could have killed Mr. Avery?"

"No; but that, too, Kittinger will learn. To my mind, Alan's death is as great a mystery as that of George Converse. But I am not at all sure that there is any connection between the two. You knew Mr. Avery pretty well, didn't you?"

"No, not at all well. Until after George died, I had met Mr. Avery but a few times. And but a few since."

"Yet—who wrote that note to him, then, that was signed, 'Your Little lady?'"

"I don't know. Have you that note, Mr. Whitney?"

"No. It is in the possession of the police. But I think you do know who wrote it. I think you are a very loyal little girl, and hate to inculpate a friend, but it is generally best to be frank with your lawyer. Admit it was Mrs. Vincent's writing."

And as Janet still hesitated, he added:

"You may as well, for an expert could discover the truth in a very few moments."

"But suppose Gay—Mrs. Vincent did write it, what can that prove?"

"Only that she had a greater friendship for Avery than she led us to suppose."

"Well,—and what of that?"

"Nothing to you or to me, perhaps," Whitney spoke gravely, "but much to the police. They ferret out a motive, then they pin the crime on the first one that it fits."

"But I don't see motive yet——"

"Because you don't want to. But you are too logical not to understand the implication that if a lady has a deeper affection for a man than she pretends, and tries to hide it, and at the same time writes him a reproach for being cold towards her and tells him he is very dear,—then, you can't be surprised that a suspicious detective should want to look further into the matter."

"But—but, Mr. Whitney," Janet turned very white and her voice shook, "you mean,—you don't mean——"

"My dear child, you may as well face it. You didn't write that note. Gabrielle Vincent did. She is going to be questioned further, of course, and if she can't prove she didn't write it, she will most certainly be under suspicion—under grave suspicion of——"

"Not of killing Alan Avery!"

"Yes. Just that. I feel it would be false kindness to deceive you in this thing. It is better for you

to know and face it. Oh, believe me, I am sorry for you! Your two dear friends, both in danger of trial for——"

"Don't say it! I can't bear it!" Janet bowed her face in her hands.

Then with a sudden raising of her white face, she set her lips together and her black eyes almost snapped as she said:

"And I won't bear it! There is a way out,—there must be a way out. And Mr. Whitney, you and I must find it! Will you help me?"

"Will I help you? Why, my God, girl, I'm only too willing. But what do you mean? Have you some secret knowledge? Something you haven't told?"

"No, indeed. I only wish I had. But Mr. Whitney, you know, as well as I do, Lloyd never killed his brother. Don't you?"

"Yes," he said, after an instant's hesitation.

"You don't mean that!" she cried. "You may not believe him guilty, but you are not sure that he isn't. Is that right?"

"That is right," he said, looking at her with troubled eyes.

"Well, then, even if you're not sure, can't you get him off? You know what I mean. I've heard that you were the best criminal lawyer in the city. That you could clear a guilty client by your force of persuasion and knowledge of technical law. Now, Lloyd isn't a guilty client, but if he is presumed to

be, the situation is the same. I want you to promise, if this case comes to trial——"

"His case will most certainly come to trial."

"Then I want you to promise to get him off—even if you have to employ means that are not—are not——"

"Don't put it into words, I understand you perfectly. And while my standing and reputation at the bar would not allow me to do anything actually illegal, sometimes there are ways and means——"

"Yes, that's it! And also, in Gabrielle's case. Get her off, too."

"Wait, wait," Whitney smiled in spite of the tragic occasion, "don't give such wholesale orders. Prisoners can't be juggled about like pawns on a chessboard. You are setting me very serious and even dangerous tasks. All I can promise is to do my best."

"And you'll do that, won't you? Won't you, Mr Whitney?"

Very beautiful Janet looked as her black eyes shone with hope, and a rising flush of joy in her cheeks banished the pallor.

"Yes, Miss Thurston,—Janet,—I will do my best. I will do all any honest lawyer can do, and—perhaps a little more. Now, I want to suggest something. I think it would be wise if you and Mrs. Vincent would come and stay with my sister and myself for a week or two. To be frank with you, Mrs. Vincent is in real danger. Partly, from her own volatile nature and her irrepressible chatter. She

talks too much,—I'm speaking frankly now,—and I think if she were not in her own home, but under the care of discreet friends, it would help a whole lot. I'm suggesting this to you first, and if you think it feasible and advisable, you can put it up to her."

"Why—why, it would seem so strange—go to stay with you?"

"With my sister, if you prefer it put that way. She is a dear good woman and would make you both comfortable, and—and safe."

"Well, perhaps it would help Gay. She does rattle on so, to the reporters and all. She didn't at the inquest, for she was warned not to, but she is irresponsible at times. But need I come, too?"

"You can't stay in your own home alone. And I assure you you will be absolutely free to do just as you wish in every respect. I'm suggesting this, be cause it is the only help I see at present. I don't know what developments may turn up, but I do know that just now, the best thing to do is to put Mrs. Vincent more or less away from the public. In fact, if she stays at home, she's sure to run her head into a noose, and that shortly."

"I see. And I think you are very kind. Of course, we will pay properly, and we will make as little trouble as possible. It will not be for long?"

"Probably not. Something may evolve any day, that will quash all suspicions of Mrs. Vincent's possible guilt."

"And Lloyd's, too?"

"And Lloyd's, too. If we can find the red-haired girl, it might go far to clearing up all our troubles."

"She must be found," said Janet. "And perhaps at your house, I should have more time to devote to a systematic search for her. I've taken that on myself. I'm going to find that woman!"

"It may be you'll find her. You may yet outwit the detectives and save the day for your two friends."

"You are not representing their danger as more than is necessary?" she said, wistfully.

"I certainly am not. Unless some other suspect is produced very shortly, Converse will be—but you know too, Miss Janet, that his own attitude is greatly against his prospects."

"I know, and he knows it now, too, and is exceedingly sorry."

"Too late now to be sorry. I warned him repeatedly,——"

"I know you did. But after all, would it really have made much difference if he had played the part of a cringing, fear-shaken wretch?"

"Oh, not as bad as that. But he might have been courteous and a little politic. You ask me to use—er—tact and policy, we'll call it, and yet you expect him to carry on with that cocksure air of his! It isn't fair."

"No, Mr. Whitney, it isn't. If I ask you,—and I do,—to stretch a point,—to evade the law—oh, why mince words! to whip the devil around the stump—it isn't fair that Lloyd should spike your guns by a

belligerent attitude or a show of injured innocence! I quite agree to that."

"Well, you do put it a bit plainly,—but that's how matters stand. Get Lloyd to help me, and we may put something over,—mind, I only say may."

"Anyway, you've given me hope. Now, I'll go home, and see what Gay says about going to your house. Sure you've room?"

"Yes, indeed. We've a big house like the Converse home. Plenty of room. Better not bring a maid, though, unless you get a new one. I'm not sure of the Vincent servants."

"Very well. And, I want to make one stipulation. I hope you won't mind. Please don't tell Lloyd of this plan. I may be wrong, but I have a feeling he won't like it, and I don't want to lay one more bit of trouble or annoyance on his bowed shoulders."

"I understand. And I promise not to tell him. But you must remember that it may leak out. He may hear of it."

"That we can't help. If he hears of it accidentally, it isn't my fault. When do you think we'd better come?"

"To-morrow, I should say. You won't need elaborate preparation, and I want to get Mrs. Vincent out of harm's way as soon as possible."

"And Mrs. Mortimer will welcome us?"

"Warmly. First, because I ask her, and also, because she will enjoy your society. She is lonesome

at times, and she is fond of people. We lead a very quiet home life and you will brighten us up a bit."

"Gay will," and Janet smiled. "She is full of vivacity, even in the midst of all this tragedy."

"And—I must say this, for I may not see you alone at the house,—you have absolute faith and trust in her."

"Oh, Mr. Whitney, yes. That's what Lloyd asked me, and I told him I had *every* faith in her."

"But you haven't. Don't begin our work together by telling me fibs. You want to trust her implicitly, but—you don't."

"I'll tell the truth, then. I love her, and I do want to trust her absolutely, but sometimes there are things, just little things, that I can't quite forgive. You won't make me say any more, will you?"

"No. You shall always say to me just as little or just as much as you choose."

"Well, then, Mr. Whitney, I will say just one more thing. You know what—what Martha said that Gay said after Mr. Avery was—was taken ill."

"About his now not being able to tell of you and your beads?"

"Yes. Now, I don't understand that. That's the sort of thing that once in a while crops up between me and Gay. Not for a minute does it make me think she's in any way mixed up with Mr. Avery's death, but—what did she mean? What could she have meant? Yet, Martha is not the sort to make

up that yarn. I know Martha so well, and I know that she spoke the truth when she told about it."

"It may have meant, in some way, that Mrs. Vincent feared the story of the beads would get you mixed up with the George Converse affair."

"Oh, no! how horrible!"

"But what else? By the way, when did you break your string of beads?"

"That night we had the card party."

"And George picked up a couple and put them in his pocket for you?"

"Oh, that is only surmise. But he may easily have done so."

"It isn't a very clear bit of testimony, anyway, I wouldn't worry about that."

"I'm not worrying about my beads, but about Gay's making that remark to Mr. Avery when he was —was dying!"

"It amounts to that, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I don't blink it. But I can't bring myself to talk to Gay about it. She would only say she didn't say it, or say anything of the sort. So, this is one of the things I want you to promise. That you will get that speech hushed up and forgotten. You can do it, somehow, can't you?"

Again the pleading black eyes gazed beseechingly into his own, and Whitney fairly drank in the fresh young beauty of the luring face.

But, "I'll do my best in that matter, too," was all he could say.

CHAPTER XV

A PROPOSAL

Lady Gay was quite willing to go to the Whitney home for a time. She always welcomed anything in the way of excitement or novelty, and she made her preparations as one getting ready for a pleasant outing.

Janet sighed to see her volatile nature expressing itself in chattering anticipation, and admonished her not to shock her hostess by her unconventionalities.

"Do the old dame good," Gay retorted. "Probably she needs a jolt. And I'll be glad to get away from this place. I don't think we'll come back here, Jannie. I couldn't live in this living-room—I'd always see that man—oh, dearie, wasn't it terrible?"

Gay broke into one of her not infrequent paroxysms of nervous crying, and Janet had to soothe and calm her as best she could.

But they finally got off, and the welcome they received from Mr. Whitney's sister was all that he had promised them.

Mrs. Mortimer was a comfortable easy-going sort of person, who was given to gossip, and who rather relished the idea of some women in her home to talk to. For her brother, though kind and devoted, was not in the habit of telling her any details of his business affairs, nor did he even exert himself to entertain her. Their evenings were spent quietly, the

lawyer immersed in his books and papers, and his sister sitting by with her knitting or sewing.

But Lady Gay changed all that. She had no sooner entered the house than she exclaimed at its size and beauty and declared they must have some people in for cards and dancing.

Mrs. Mortimer blinked at this, but held her peace and secretly hoped there would be some doings.

She followed her guests to their rooms and hovered about, enchanted by Janet's wistful charm and bewildered by Gay's merry mischief.

"You're a duck!" Mrs. Vincent informed her hostess, "a lovely fat duck. I know we shall be cronies. Your brother is delightful, but I'm afraid of him. Now, I'm going to twist *you* round my finger."

Mrs. Mortimer beamed with an obvious willingness to submit to the twisting process.

Later, they gathered in the library, and again Gay was enthusiastic in her praises and her plans.

"What an enormous room!" she cried. "Gorgeous for a dance! Just fling back the rugs and there you are!"

She flung back one corner of a large rug and executed a Charleston while Mrs. Mortimer happily gasped. She had never seen any one like Gay. Few people had.

The library was not for the exclusive use of Whitney, though the great table desk was piled high with his files and papers. But there were tables of

new books and magazines, shelves full of volumes that were not all legal lore and a general air of homeyness and comfort.

Gay lighted a cigarette and ensconced herself in the biggest of the big easy chairs, and then, thoroughly at ease, she set out to be entertaining.

And she was. Mrs. Mortimer thought she had never seen a more charming person and she listened almost with rapture.

Janet, her thoughts in a tumult and her heart sad, wandered about the great room, looking absently at the curios and rare objects here and there.

She picked up an illustrated weekly. It showed pictures of a visiting prince in masquerade. All the pictures were full of the joy of life and laughing people, but Janet felt as if she should never laugh again.

How could Gay rattle on so! Yet she was glad, for it saved her the necessity of making herself entertaining.

Whitney came in to greet them. He had already changed and looked distinguished in his dinner clothes.

Janet felt suddenly that she had never before realized what a cultured man he was. At least he seemed more so in his own house than she had heretofore noticed.

Gay frankly told him so.

"Why, you Beau Brummell!" she cried, running to him and holding out both hands. "You

come in like a movie actor! Are we welcome to your enchanted castle, my friend?"

"Yes, indeed,—most heartily," he returned, perforce, but his words were more emphatic than his tone. That left nothing to be desired, but Gay noticed that his eyes strayed toward Janet, who now advanced, smiling, from her chair in the corner.

In this case it was Whitney who held out both hands as he said:

"Welcome? I should say you are,—both of you."

If the last was an afterthought, it was still very cordial, and no host could be more correct of bearing and demeanor.

Through dinner and during the evening no mention was made of the tragedies they were going through.

Once or twice the subject was or seemed to be imminent, but Whitney insistently dismissed it and kept the conversation in lighter vein.

But next morning, the lawyer said to Janet, very seriously:

"I must speak to you alone for a few moments."

She nodded her head silently, and he took her to a small den of his own.

"To-day may bring about some new disclosures," he began, "or, perhaps I shall have to say, suspicions."

Janet turned pale and her heart gave a jump.

"Gay" she gasped, "oh, no!"

"I don't know. That's why I didn't want to talk last night. Janet, how can she be so blithe and careless?"

"But, Mr. Whitney, you don't—you can't think she's—she's——"

"Guilty? As I told you, we have to face facts. It has been proved that the candy and the nuts on the table that night were absolutely free of taint. Also Avery's cigarette case has been examined and that, too, shows no poisoned material. Even the two soda mints found in his pocket were pure and clean. Now remains only the whisky. No one thinks the maid introduced it into his glass."

"She couldn't," Janet said, slowly, "it was the glass he had already used."

"Well, then Gay——"

"But she couldn't either!" the girl cried. "I filled his glass the second time! I poured in some whisky and added the soda water. So, if anybody poisoned that whisky, I did!"

"And we know you didn't. So it must have been Gay. Don't say she couldn't, of course she could. She's always running about the room, pausing here, there and everywhere. If she chose, she could easily have slipped poison into Avery's empty glass, and then when you refilled it, there was the deadly draught all prepared."

"But why,—why?"

"Don't ask, Janet. Mrs. Vincent has secrets in her life that you do not dream of. I am not only

her lawyer, but I am a man of the world, and I have naturally a knowledge of things you know nothing of, and I hope to God you never will."

"Oh, pshaw, don't talk as if I were a saint—or a baby! I'm old enough and advanced enough to know these things. Now, having told me so much, Mr. Whitney, you must tell me more. What are these things, at least what are such of them that bear on this case?"

"No, I can't tell you,—anyway, not now. I must be off. And I don't say she did this thing. I only want you to realize that she might have done it, and she could have done it. That's all. Now put it out of your mind."

"What!" Janet stared at him, "put it out of my mind? You must be out of your own mind to suggest such a thing!"

Whitney gazed admiringly at her flashing eyes and rising color, and smiled, as he returned:

"You're quite right. But, really, I said that without thinking. In my legal capacity, let us say. I always try to soothe my clients' fears."

"Well, I'm not your client, and I don't want any soothing or any glossing over the truth. Nor do I want any bad news broken gently to me. If you learn anything further, tell me, but don't try to let me down easy."

"My, my, what a little spitfire it is! Perhaps I shall have good news for you to-night when I come

home. And I shall try to come home early, as we have house guests."

"What do you plan to do to-day,—in this matter?" Janet asked, ingnoring his rather fatuous smile.

"All I can, but it may not be much. Of course, I have other cases. I'm not a detective, you know."

"No, and the detective you have is a noodle!"

"Fie, fie, poor Mr. Kittinger,—and he's doing the best he can."

"A pretty poor best. I'm going to get a detective of my own!"

"Going to buy one? Well, well! But as to my work to-day in the interest of our case, I'm going to the office and receive Kittinger's report, then I'm going to see Lloyd."

"Oh, are you? What for? I mean with what definite point in view?"

"That's the worst of it. I have no definite point in view. But I thought a confab with him could do no harm even if it does no good."

"Of course. May I call you up and ask the result?"

"Better not. These things are not telephone talk. But if there's anything really important, I'll come back and tell you. Shall you be in all day?"

"I'm going over to our apartment to get the mail and attend to some things. Except for that I'll probably be in all day."

"The car's at your service. Better go for a drive."

And with a few words of farewell, the lawyer started for his office.

The report from Detective Kittinger amounted to practically nothing.

Although he tried to make up a list of points, they were either old ones rehashed or new and theoretical ones not yet tried out.

Harrison Whitney looked at him.

"You haven't done very much, man, have you? Well, I acknowledge it isn't an easy row to hoe. And I know Rome wasn't built in a day and all that. But well, keep at it. Take a few more days and do whatever you can, but do try to learn something new or something definite. Beg pardon, I know you are doing just that, but, keep at it. Good-morning."

And then Whitney went to see Lloyd Converse.

He found that young man in the depths of despair, but he brightened up as the lawyer appeared.

"I can't stand it, Mr. Whitney," he cried. "Don't tell me I brought it on myself; that doesn't help any. But to be shut up here unable to get busy and——"

"What would you do, Lloyd, if you did get busy?"

"I'd find the red-haired girl."

"How would you go about it, when all other seekers have failed?"

The cold common sense of the lawyer checked

Lloyd's impetuous talk, and he sank back crushed and broken.

"And it's not only the matter of that girl, it's also the question of Avery's death. That is coming as close to you, perhaps as the tragedy of your brother."

"What do you mean?"

"They've checked up the chemical analyses, and there was positively no way for that poison to get into Avery's mouth except from that second high-ball."

"Impossible!"

"It doesn't do any good to exclaim *impossible*. I'm telling you, the candy and nuts, even the soda mints in his pocket have been examined."

"He didn't eat the soda mints?"

"No, but if he had had suicidal intent, he might have carried poisoned tablets, and might have taken one."

"Perhaps he did,—perhaps he had another."

"Nonsense. Why carry three if two were all right. And I know he didn't, for as he left me, he said he might have to get some, and then, looking in his pocket he found he had two. Well, anyway, the soda mints had nothing to do with it. Nor the nuts and candy. So it had to be the high-ball."

"Go on."

"Then, you see, it was his second one,—that is, his same glass refilled. Now as the first one hadn't poisoned him, that lets the servants out. And the

poison must—I say, *must* have been put in that glass by one of the only two other people in the room."

"Or by Avery himself."

"Always admitting that possibility. But is it reasonable that a man about to commit suicide would choose just those conditions? Unless he wanted to incriminate the women. And you know, Lloyd, we both know, Alan Avery would be incapable of such a deed as that!"

Lloyd did know it. But the only other alternatives were almost equally unthinkable.

"Well?" he said, miserably.

"Well, I'm sorry, but you must see the thing as it is. Then we must think what is the best thing to be done."

"What can be done?"

"First, realize it all. See for yourself where this line of reasoning takes us. Granting, which we have to grant, there was no possible way for the poison to be administered save in the glass, which woman did it?"

"What!" Lloyd's fists clenched and his square jaw set fiercely as he glared at Whitney.

"Oh, don't take that attitude with me." The lawyer spoke a little wearily. "I'm only telling you what the police and the public and the courts will say and think. Leave out the personal equation, please. When the law asks which woman did it, what will they answer themselves?"

Lloyd became thoughtful.

"There's only one answer to that," he said, quietly. "If either of those women did put poison in Avery's glass, of course it was Gay. It never was Janet."

"Of course you'd say that, and of course, I would. But,—however, I suppose you can't take the viewpoint of a disinterested observer."

"But how could anyone,—compelled to make a choice,—choose otherwise? How could the veriest simpleton or rogue suspect Janet in preference to Gay?"

"Other things being equal, it might be conceivable that the dear public, like the old Romans, prefer a lovely young girl for a victim. I only mean that there is a morbid, a vicious undercurrent in the public mind that demands a sensational heroine if it is possible to get such."

"You cur! You ghoul!"

"Oh, Lloyd, what a temper you have! No wonder you're in here. How can I ever get you out? If you turn on me like that, what would you do if strangers said the same thing? I ignore your speech, you are not yourself,—and Lord knows, I don't wonder! Now, the two women will be,—are suspected. A choice will be made. All I can do,—all anybody can do is to turn the trend of that choice if possible, in one or the other direction. Which?"

Lloyd Converse stared at him. The question was too big. What could he say? Gay, of course, must be his answer, and yet,—poor little butterfly Lady

Gay! Yet if it really was either of them, it could not have been Janet.

Lloyd Converse was very square. But he had never before been confronted with a situation like this.

"Whitney," he said, "I can't answer. You know, of course, my heart, my soul cries out to save Janet at—at any cost. But—if one is guilty and one is innocent, then I say, we must find out which is which."

"Gosh, man, do you mean that?"

"Oh, hush! I can't think. My brain is reeling. I know—I tell you I *know* neither of those women ever dreamed of such a thing."

"Don't say that over and over. It's that or Avery's suicide. And, if either of the women did do it, there must have been a motive and it must have been a motive of which we know nothing. Still, remember, Avery's picture in their home, a note to Avery from one or the other of them, in his desk—the motive is not entirely obscure. Now, which? Don't you feel, that we must save Janet any cost —at *any* cost?"

Lloyd thought a moment, then he flung back his head and said, proudly: "That won't be necessary. To save her at any cost. If that girl is guilty she never will let Gay Vincent suffer in her stead. So add that to your facts!"

Whitney pondered. "No," he said, slowly, "she wouldn't. But—would Gay let Janet suffer?"

"My God," Lloyd groaned, "that I don't know."

"Well, we'll wait a day or two till the storm bursts. The police are working quietly but none the less steadily. They have narrowed the thing down to the points I've made here. Soon, suspicion will swerve from one of those women to a definite name. Shall we force the trend of suspicion before it turns toward a certain name?"

"No!" thundered Lloyd. "I didn't murder my brother, I didn't murder Alan Avery, and now I don't propose to murder Gay Vincent."

"Not even to save Janet's life?"

"No! Better for Janet to die and for me to die too, than for either or both of us to live with the shadow of a stain on our souls."

"Think it over, Lloyd. Your principles are all right if Janet is guilty, but we know she isn't. There's no reason she should be a martyr to a wicked designing woman, who is also a murderer. I speak dispassionately, as I mean it, only in case of Mrs. Vincent's guilt."

"You think Gay guilty, then?"

"Now, old chap, what else can I think? No reasoning being could deny that it rests between the two, and—it wasn't Janet."

Something in the cadence of his tone made Lloyd look up quickly, but he saw in the other's eyes only a strong faith in the girl's innocence, nothing more.

"You know it wasn't, too. You know she's incapable——"

"To my mind they're both incapable of such a deed," Lloyd said, "and what's more I don't believe either of them did it."

"Then, merely as a suggestion, what happened?"

"I don't know—I don't *know*. Go away, Whitney, let me think this out. Come again, tomorrow, will you?"

"I will," and laying his hand lightly on the bowed head for an instant, the lawyer left.

He pondered through the day just how much or how little to tell Janet of this interview. He did not go home until the usual time, and when he did get there, he found his small family circle gathered in the library awaiting him.

"Any news?" Janet inquired eagerly. "Speak right out, we've been talking of it all day, and there are to be no secrets."

"Nothing definite," he returned. "I saw Lloyd."

"How did he seem?"

"Much the same. We had a long confab, and it ended by his telling me to go away, he wanted to think things out."

"Perhaps he has a new idea," said Gay, hopefully.

"Perhaps so. We concluded to wait a day or two to see what the police dig up. It seems they're busy."

Soon after, the subject was dropped by general consent.

With her strange ebullience of feeling, Gay proposed an evening of bridge. She wanted to call in

some friends, but Janet wouldn't hear of it, so they played by themselves. After a few rubbers Gay wearied of the game and running to the piano treated them to some lively jazz.

This enchanted Mrs. Mortimer, but so got on Janet's nerves that she left the room.

Whitney followed her, and drew her with him into his den.

He closed the door, and said, in low tones:

"I must speak with you alone. I can't talk before that whited sepulchre nor before my sister."

"What!" cried Janet, "Why do you call Gay that?"

"Because she is. Janet, she killed Avery as sure as you sit there!"

"Don't say that unless you *know* it! Do you?"

"I know that either you or she did, and I know you didn't. Does it surprise you so very much?"

About to reply, Janet paused. It did surprise her,—very much, but she knew she hadn't killed Avery, and if one of them had, it must be Gay.

"But, I don't believe it!" she cried, in utter misery, the tears coming to her eyes.

"We must talk quickly," Whitney said. "You see, Gay's quite likely to pop in on us any minute."

"Yes, she is. Have you any news?"

"Not news, but a decision. Two decisions, in fact. One that I have come to, and one for you to make."

The girl looked at him in amazement. He went on.

"Face the situation. Lloyd is under arrest for his brother's murder. He will be tried and convicted. No evidence or clue has turned up in his favor and I am positive none will."

He was not prepared for the storm of weeping that followed this speech. Usually calm and self-controlled, Janet's nerves gave way and she sobbed bitterly.

Impulsively, he put an arm round her and taking her handkerchief from her trembling fingers he wiped her eyes with it.

"Go on," she said, seeming both unconscious of and indifferent to his encircling arm.

"I will," he returned, gravely. "Your friend, Gay, is also certain to be arrested, tried and convicted for the murder of Alan Avery. Now, you see, your two best and dearest in this world stand in the very shadow of the rope. No one can save them—but yourself. You can save both, if you will."

"How?" Janet disengaged herself from his arm, still unnoticing the situation. "How?" Her hands were clasped, her face glowing with hope.

He drew her close to him and whispered:

"Marry me,—I will clear them both."

"You cad! You coward!" she said, not loudly, but with infinite scorn. "Can you do it?"

"I can do it—at the expense of my honor, my legal oath, my integrity, my very manhood. I can

do it,—as you once suggested,—by underhand means. But I will do it, unless you promise to marry me. Otherwise both of them may go to the chair, and I won't lift a finger to prevent. But marry me, and I will save both. Will you, Janet?"

"Yes," said Janet.

CHAPTER XVI

FLEMING STONE COMES

HER mind was made up instantly. To save either or both of those dear ones, she would, if necessary, die. At least, she would die to save Lloyd, and she would make great sacrifices to save Gay.

So, if this was really the only way out, then there was but one answer to Whitney's proposition.

To be sure, the idea of marrying Whitney was worse than death, but that didn't deter Janet, her one thought was whether it would really mean the salvation of her loved ones.

"Wait," she said; "I must understand this thing thoroughly. This is a plain business deal. You agree to free from all suspicion of crime and to clear absolutely both Lloyd and Gay if I agree to marry you."

"I do."

"You're sure it can be done?"

"I will not deceive you. It must be done by clever cunning. Lloyd will be freed by means of political influence which I can wield and Gay by a plan which I can carry through if I wish."

"You will not involve any innocent person?"

"Most certainly not."

"And you will not use these means to free them, unless——"

"Why should I?"

"But Gay is not really under suspicion."

"Pardon me, she is and you are, too."

"Definitely?"

"The police are getting impatient to make an arrest. It can only be delayed a day or so,—unless——"

"You understand I do not love you."

"I will make you love me. Oh, Janet, darling, be kinder to me! I am willing to perjure my very soul for you, to stoop to means that I would have scorned to touch, to ask favors that I cringe to think of,—all, all are as naught to win your love—to win you! You beauty! You wonder girl!"

His eyes shone, his voice trembled and he took a step nearer.

But she waved him back with a gesture of impatience.

"I say yes to your proposition, terrible though it all is. But I would do more than that to save the man I love. Now, you keep your part of this dreadful bargain and I will keep mine. I promise, after Lloyd is set free, without question of guilt, and when Gay is freed of all possible suspicion, I will marry you, but until you have accomplished those things, I hold myself in no way bound to you."

"I trust your promise and I accept your terms. May I not kiss you?"

"You may not! Please realize that I am not yet your wife, not even affianced to you, until you have made good your word. Are you sure you can do it?"

"I am sure."

There was a steely glitter in Whitney's eye, but his voice was gentle and his manner courteous.

Then he smiled, as one who has accomplished his end, and bides his time.

"What will happen first?"

Janet spoke eagerly, like a child who has been promised a new toy and wants it at once.

"Impatient one!" he looked at her indulgently and also with a new air of possession which sent a thrill of fear to her breast.

"Nothing that you can know about. The details of my plot are not for the ears of little girls. Oh, don't look like that. There's nothing gruesome going on. It's chiefly to persuade some friends of mine, some high officials, to pull some wires for me, and roll some logs, and generally lend a helping hand."

"Are these things very dreadful?"

"For an honest lawyer,—yes."

"Are you an honest lawyer?"

"If I do these things I never can call myself one again."

"Yet you will do them?"

"I will do them, and would, were they ten times as wicked and dishonorable as they are. And, after all, they're no more than many lawyers would do,

without a thought. But I've always kept my standards high."

"I know you have, Mr. Whitney. Now, I do not love you, I do not even like you, but I respect your judgment and your knowledge. You assure me there is no other way?"

"As sure as he is alive now, Lloyd Converse will not be alive a few months from now, unless I intervene."

"And you hold a man's life in your hand like that, and refuse to save it except at a price!"

"Yes. But, remember, Lloyd did kill his brother, I am getting him off under false pretences,—by perjured witnessing."

"I'm sorry that is the case, but I can only say, go on, then. Do whatever you can, however wrong, —always provided that no innocent person is harmed. And Gay? She is in equal danger?"

"She is, or you are. The police hold it must have been one of you two."

"Go on, then. I have but one wish in life. To free those two dear and innocent people. I will pay any price—even the one you ask."

"So be it. I will set the wheels in motion tomorrow. Shall you tell Lloyd?"

"There is nothing to tell until you have accomplished your part. Please understand that thoroughly. You have my promise, but it is entirely dependent on your success."

"That is assured." He smiled at her with that possessive air she had already learned to hate.

But she had faith in the man. She had always known of him as a lawyer of unblemished repute and undeniable ability, and though her conscience rebelled at the step she had taken and was taking, yet she would have sacrificed conscience, honor, right, everything, to save Lloyd.

Janet was like that. Impetuous, impulsive, quick of decision, but ready to sacrifice herself utterly for those she loved.

She lay awake long, thinking it all over. And the more she thought, the more she was glad she had decided as she had, and was conscious of a deep feeling of gratitude that a way out had been provided, even if it was a wicked way.

After all, the wickedness could not be so very dreadful, she argued, or other lawyers wouldn't be practicing it. What the details of the wrong might be since Whitney had refused to tell her, she didn't care much about knowing. To have Lloyd free, and out of that dreadful prison,—no price was too great to pay.

Of the price to be paid, she would not allow herself to think at all.

Time enough for that.

Next morning there was no noticeable change in the manner of the conspirators.

Unless, perhaps, it might have been thought that Whitney showed a certain trace of contentment, as

one does when a plan goes well; and Janet a little excited air of hope and expectancy.

But these were mere hints and carried nowhere.

"Whatever were you doing all night, Harry?" asked his sister. "I saw a light in your den until nearly four o'clock this morning!"

"I had a hard case to work up, Sis," he smiled at her. "It required a lot of research work and close application."

"Yet you show no signs of fatigue," said Gay, looking admiringly at the well groomed man.

"No, of course not. In this day and generation, one must keep running to keep up with the procession, and to keep running means to keep in condition."

Gay had long had a *penchant* for Harrison Whitney and she had hoped to charm him to her side during her stay in his home. It had seemed such a good opportunity. But aside from being a courteous host he paid little attention to her. Indeed it seemed to Gay that he almost preferred Janet. Yet that could not be. Janet was a mere baby and beside, she was engaged to Converse. Harrison Whitney was forty or more, and that was too old to be caught by a schoolgirl like Jannie.

Gay was one of those women to whom a child she has known is always a child.

But there were no glances exchanged between Janet and her host. There were no especial attentions to her on his part. And as he left the house

for the day, his cheery "good-morning" was impersonal and alike for all.

"I'm going over home for the mail," Janet said; "want to go, Gay?"

"No, dear. I can't bear to go into that house. We must see about getting another apartment. You run along. And bring me my orchid scarf with the ostrich trimming. And the bag that matches. And some more of my cigarettes. And——"

"Here, here, I can't remember all those. I'll bring them, but you make a list. What are you doing to-day?"

"Mrs. Mortimer and I are going down town shopping and may do a matinée."

"Yes, dear, I hope you will. It will do you good and divert your mind."

Janet smiled to herself at her own speech, for Gay's mind was always a whirl of diversion and little else.

Janet walked over home. It was not far, and she loved the crisp, fresh city air.

Her thoughts were deep and serious, but not once did she waver or regret her bargain made the night before.

Reaching the apartment, however, all other ideas dwindled beside those aroused by a letter that awaited her there.

It was from the judge to whom she had written in Boston. And he told her that there was only one detective he knew of capable of handling the Converse case. That one, he said, was Fleming Stone.

Stone, he advised her, took only cases that appealed to him as exceptional, in one way or another. But Mr. Stone would call upon her that day at noon, and he trusted she would lay the matter before him and be guided entirely by his decisions.

Janet gasped.

Stone, the great Fleming Stone, coming there in an hour or so, and no one to attend to the affair but herself.

Yet, she reflected, who could help her?

Lloyd was unavailable, Gay was worse than useless.

Harrison Whitney was the one she would have chosen to be at the conference, but as matters stood now, it seemed inadvisable to bring the two men together.

In truth, Janet secretly feared that Mr. Stone's advent might cause Whitney to throw over the plans he was making; and that would not suit her at all. She had far greater faith in Whitney's " plans " than in Stone's detective work. She had seen detectives at work, and as near as she could make out they got just nowhere at all.

So, she told Martha to prepare luncheon for them both, hoping Mr. Stone would stay, and then she set herself to work to make a coherent and methodical list of all the clues and evidence in the whole matter.

This was no mean task, but Janet was systematic and efficient, and she compiled a neat list of the main facts of both the Converse case and the Avery affair.

She felt it all a terrible responsibility, but there was no one of whom to ask help. A dozen times she was tempted to telephone Mr. Whitney to come right up and meet Stone with her. But always came the fear that it would curtail if not entirely prevent the schemes the lawyer was working out.

Again, she was tempted to dismiss Stone without even a hearing, telling him the matter was practically closed, and then trust all to Whitney.

But she finally determined, since Mr. Stone was a friend of Judge Payne, she would greet him pleasantly as a caller, invite him to lunch and then see how things stood. She could trust herself to make a quick decision, if one should be necessary.

The three maid-servants were still in the house, keeping the apartment in order, and they welcomed the opportunity of serving Miss Janet.

Fleming Stone arrived promptly and Martha admitted him.

Janet's heart gave a thrill of expectancy as she heard the footsteps in the hall, and she felt anew the terrific responsibility that rested on her young shoulders.

She must do her best, and make the most of this, the only chance to be of real help to Lloyd and Gay.

The man who entered the little living-room set her at once at her ease.

He advanced with the pleasantest, kindliest smile and held out what seemed to her a helpful, reassuring hand.

"Miss Thurston?" he said, and the low steady tones gave her an instant feeling of security and confidence.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Stone, how good of you to come."

"Thank Judge Payne for it," he said, with a slow smile. "I have no business to be here at all, for my duties are screaming for me from all directions. But I have a habit of obeying the judge and whatever he tells me, that I do. You know him?"

"Not personally. He was a friend of my parents, and I wrote to him in a moment of absolute despair and danger."

"Is it as bad as all that?"

Stone's solicitous air was also alert and attentive. It was quite clear he wanted to hear the story without further preliminaries.

He was a middle-aged man, dark and rather grave. His fine face showed intellect and wisdom as well as judgment and experience. In his manner lay his chief charm. He conveyed his wishes or intentions without a word and without gesture.

But Janet knew from the way he sat at attention, and the eagerness of his eyes that he was ready to listen and she must begin at once.

She did so, and with the help of the memorandum she had prepared, she gave her visitor a full yet succinct account of the murder of George Converse and the death of Alan Avery.

Stone listened with unwavering attention. Now

and then he would interrupt to put some pertinent question, but for the most part, Janet told the story continuously.

The Converse murder was harder for her to talk about even than Avery's death, but she went bravely ahead. She described Lloyd's home coming and his finding his brother's dead body. She told of all the attendant circumstances, especially those that seemed strange or bizarre.

The wet footprint interested Stone greatly.

"What could that mean?" he exclaimed. "It couldn't have been the victim's, since his shoes showed dust in the laces and all that. So it must have been the criminal's for surely there was no third party present. I have never met with a clue like that before!"

The soap and the soap paper he also thought important.

The red-haired girl he paid less attention to.

"It doesn't seem like a woman's job," he said, his deep set gray eyes staring hard at nothing. "It is more reasonable to assume that the red-haired girl fled at the murderer's approach. It is almost impossible for the doctors to tell just how long a man has been dead."

"I know it," Janet returned. "And I hate to think a woman did it, but the police admit of no persons there except that girl and—and Lloyd."

"We'll take that up later," Stone said, kindly, noticing her agitation. "Go on, please."

So Janet went on. She told of the torn telegram in George's pocket and of the pistol Lloyd had picked up and the glasses he had handled.

"I want to tell you everything," she said, "that seems to incriminate Lloyd. For if I don't, the police will, and I prefer you to get it from me. They twist and distort everything to point toward Lloyd's guilt, and—it doesn't!"

"No, Miss Thurston, it doesn't."

"You don't mean you can deduce anything already?" she cried, in astonishment.

Stone smiled.

"Not from your story as yet. But I've read up the case, more or less, and I don't by any means see anything that positively is incriminating to Mr. Converse, except motive and opportunity. They mean a lot, to be sure, but they are not everything."

"No, indeed!" Under his sympathetic influence Janet's confidence grew and she forged briskly ahead.

"Now tell me about your beads," he said with an encouraging smile.

"I see you know about those, Mr. Stone. Well, there's little to tell save that two beads which are unmistakably from my own necklace were picked up in George's room the morning after the murder."

"Who put them there?"

She looked up quickly.

"You think they were planted?"

"Must have been. You weren't in that room, were you?"

"No."

"To think Converse dropped them from his pocket at that crucial moment is too much of a coincidence. Moreover, had they been there they would have been found sooner."

"That's the way it seemed to me. Then you think the—the murderer placed them there to—to incriminate me!"

"Perhaps not that. Perhaps it was intended to incriminate the brother. Mightn't Mr. Lloyd have had your beads in his pocket?"

"Yes, he might have. But you've already built up a designing, diabolical murderer. Do you eliminate the red-haired girl?"

"By no means. Only I still say, that so far, it looks to me more like a man's work than a woman's."

"But she wasn't a little, timid woman."

"How do you know?"

"You see, Mr. Avery,—who died later,—was rather a detective, and he said,—I remember his very words,—'rather large than small; rather tall than short; rather stout than slim; and with bushy, flaming red hair.' That's the woman."

"Heavens! Where did he get all that?"

"He said he pieced it together from the policeman's description."

"No wonder they killed that man! He would

soon have been too smart for them. He would have found that girl next."

"Yes, I think that's why they killed Mr. Avery. But how did they kill him?"

"That must come in its due time. Go on about the red-haired girl."

"That's about all we know of Lucille."

"You know her name!"

"Oh, no, we call her that just to have something to call her by. Then, you see, she must have washed her hands in the bathroom, because Binns, the policeman, recognized that peculiar fragrance of Bouquet soap. He vows he noticed it as Lucille passed him."

"She must have passed fairly close, then, for that is a delicate odor."

"I know it. But she did pass closely, or he couldn't have seen all the points of her costume that he did see."

"True enough. Any more about Lucille?"

"No; except that I discovered, or, rather learned from the Converse cook that two of her flatirons were missing that next morning."

"Flatirons!"

Fleming Stone looked really excited for the first time.

"There was nothing in the papers about flatirons!" he said.

"I told the police detective, but he only scouted the idea that there could be any importance in it," Janet said, looking anxious.

"Flatirons! My Heavens, we will brand the murderer with those flatirons! Go on, Miss Thurston, tell me now about the Avery matter. I can't spare much more time here. I must see the police and also Mr. Converse."

"Then you'll take the case?"

"Take the case? Good Lord, the case has taken me! You couldn't drag me out of it until we have the red-haired girl by the heels and the flatirons branding her!"

"But you don't suspect her of the murder?"

"Dear lady, it is too soon to suspect or even to deduce. Just tell me all—everything you can think of about the Avery case, and then I'll be off."

"But you'll stay for luncheon?"

"If you can have it at once and make it a short one. I must lunch somewhere, and if you shut out the servants, we can talk and eat at the same time."

It was seldom that Fleming Stone allowed himself to get even as much excited as this, but he began to think that very little had been done on this case and he deeply desired to get busy before all trails were cold.

"If I had only been here sooner," he wailed as they sat down to the table. "I've almost never had a case about which I didn't say that, but in this instance it's only too applicable. I might,—nay, *must* have saved young Avery's life had I been here at the beginning of the Converse case. Now, Miss Thurston, I don't want to spoil your own meal, but you can eat after I'm gone. Tell me the Avery details rapidly."

There was,—there could be nothing rude about Fleming Stone's manner. He showed simply the necessary haste of a man who must not let the grass grow under his feet, yet who must, by all the laws of hygiene and common sense fortify himself by a due and proper meal before he started out.

He looked forward to a busy, even rushed afternoon, and perhaps evening and possibly night. He saw light where others saw only darkness. He read evidence that was Greek to others. And he hoped, with all his sympathetic soul as well as his professional pride, not only to solve these mysteries but to solve them quickly.

So Janet went over the events of the evening that Alan Avery had died in that house. Sad enough they were, gruesome enough, indeed, but they did not tear her heartstrings as did those involving the man she loved and his brother.

She carefully depicted every step of the way from the bringing in of the tray by Martha, to her own mixing of the high-ball, of which Avery drank and died.

Stone listened with minutest attention.

"Were you noticing Mrs. Vincent at the moment?" he asked.

"No," she said, with a pained look that showed this was not a new thought to her. "No. You see, she is a restless creature, who seldom sits still long. She flies across the room and back, apparently for no purpose whatever. She runs to look out of a

window, to straighten a picture, to get a different sort of cigarette, or for just nothing at all. I'm so accustomed to this way of hers that I never think of it, and I cannot say whether at the moment I handed the glass to Mr. Avery she was in her chair or butterflying about. But she never touched that glass, of that I'm positive."

"Was Avery sitting down?"

"Yes."

"And both you women standing?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Stone," Janet smiled, "the poor man had bobbed up and down from his chair so continually as Gay bobbed in and out of hers, that I laughed and told him to sit still. It was too ridiculous for him to play Jack-in-the-box, as he did."

"I see. Now, think carefully,—did Avery raise his hand to his mouth, as if taking, say, a tablet, before he drank?"

"I've tried to think that out, myself. But I don't know. I was fussing with the ice tub and the ginger ale bottles and I didn't look at him."

"Naturally enough. Now, Miss Thurston, I shall go first to see Mr. Lloyd Converse. Then I shall call on Mr. Whitney at his office. And this evening I shall doubtless spend looking over the objects held as evidence by the police. Will you meet me here to-morrow morning for a report?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Stone," and Janet bestowed on him the first hopeful smile she had given since the tragedy befell.

CHAPTER XVII

STONE GETS BUSY

FLEMING STONE had investigated many mystery cases, but he had never run across one which intrigued him so immediately as this Converse affair.

From the moment he heard of the red-haired girl and the flatirons he pawed the ground, figuratively, like a war-horse scenting battle.

The clues were so unusual, the evidence so scant, the conclusions so easily considered foregone, that he yearned to dig into it himself and prove the present detectives right or wrong, feeling sure they were the latter.

He changed his order of programme as he thought the matter over. He concluded to go first of all to see the police.

The organized law was never inimical to Fleming Stone. They knew too much of his past successes, they knew too, that his was no cocksureness of opinion, but a sound judgment of testimony and true deduction from evidence.

He was soon in conference with Detective Young.

"Open and shut case," declared that worthy. "Both of 'em, Mr. Stone. That Lloyd chap, he wanted his brother out o' the way 'cause why? 'Cause he wanted his fair share of his father's kale. And why not? Oh, no, he didn't premeditate nothin', just came home, by appointment, d' y' see? and find-

ing brother George alone in the house, he pleads his cause, gets turned down and in a quarrel he bumps the other off. Too easy. Then Friend Lloyd, being a novice and so all full of ideas that there ought to be clues and such, he fixes up that wet footprint and spends an hour a making a drorin' of it on the nice clean TAM HTAB. That's about all there is to it. The rest you can read in the reports."

"Can I see the exhibits? The washcloth and flatirons."

"Washcloth! Flatirons! Say, Mr. Stone you got the wrong case by the ear. I never heard of those clues."

"No? Well, the flatirons couldn't very well be here, as they've disappeared."

"What do you mean, flatirons? Is anybody holdin' out anything on me?"

"Not that I know of. What's that Kittinger person like?"

"Like any slab-sided, knock-kneed, wall-eyed, pigeon-toed gink who tries to butt in on a game he doesn't know anything about."

"Why did Mr. Whitney employ such a man?"

"I think somebody wished him on Mr. Whitney. 'Course, he wouldn't know how to pick a detective. Harrison Whitney isn't so much of a criminal lawyer as he's a Wall Street one. He doesn't know a detective from a hole in the wall. So when he said to an aid, 'Run out and catch me a detective, quick,' why, like as not the messenger had a cousin or a

brother-in-law out of a job, and he just drug him in. Anyhow, I can't account for Harrison Whitney getting buncoed with that moron any other way."

"And Kittinger found out nothing?"

"Land, I don't know. He never told me if he did. I've found out all I've found out by hard diggin' and so far as I'm concerned, I can't see any more places to dig."

"Now, about the Avery matter."

Young's face fell.

"That's a bad job, Mr. Stone. One of those two women did for Alan Avery. There's no way outa that. Abserlutely none! I hate to think it, but it's right there. A few days more and they'll be arrested, —one or both of 'em."

"Which, for choice?"

"If you mean which do I choose, I'd choose to save the girl, every time. But if you mean which is the most likely suspect, then I gotta say the girl, again. She's cute enough to poison a dozen men if she set out to."

"Bright girl, then?"

"Bright as they come. And Lordy, but a nice young lady. Her and Mr. Converse now, the sweetest couple! And look at 'em! Both in for it!"

"Whitney's a clever lawyer, why can't he get Converse off?"

"Whitney's clever, yes. But not in jest that way. Whitney, he's one of these here impeccable chaps,—wouldn't swerve a hair's breadth from the

law for anything or anybody. And I don't mean maybe. I mean Harrison Whitney's really like that. He's built up his reputation, a big one, on his honesty and integrity. I daresay he might get Lloyd through a knothole, but if he was going to soil his fingers pullin' him through, he'd let go of him."

"I see."

"Yes, sir, that's the way of it. Now Mr. Stone, what you going to do?"

"I'm not sure myself, but I have to work quickly. Let me see the exhibits, will you?"

He looked over the motley array.

The weapon, the torn telegram, the footprinted bath mat, the foolish little handkerchief, two blue beads, with some other odds and ends seemed a grotesque lot of junk by the study of which one might hang or free a man.

Stone took them in with a few quick, keen glances. Glances that seemed perfunctory, but which photographed the objects indelibly upon his retentive memory.

"Now I'll take a run over to the Converse house," he said. "Want to go along, Young?"

"Can't just now, too busy. I'll let you have the keys, Mr. Stone. Return them as soon as you can."

So Fleming Stone went to the home of the Converse brothers.

He let himself in and found it untenanted. The servants came at stated intervals, but none was there just then, so he had the place to himself.

Swiftly he made his investigations. Examinations, rather, for he could scarcely be said to investigate, so quickly did he dart about. Yet he saw everything he wanted to see, and wasted time on nothing else.

The bathroom claimed his attention, but having been done up more or less by the faithful Maggie there was little left there to interest him.

He tried the small white cupboard on the wall and found it locked.

But such locks are by no means complicated and Stone produced a small implement from his pocket which quickly opened the door.

Inside there were a few bottles of toilet preparations and on the lower shelf, what looked like a squeezed-up washcloth.

And that's what it was. A washcloth, not of the rough Turkish toweling, but made of a smoother linen cloth and which had dried in the same wad it had been squeezed into while wet.

Stone fingered it very gingerly, and scrutinized it carefully.

"By Jove," he said, "if Lloyd Converse himself didn't squeeze that up, we have rather a pretty bit of evidence."

He carefully replaced it and relocked the door with his wire.

Then he went down and reconnoitered the basement, and after that left the house.

He looked around in hope of seeing the police-

man Binns, but couldn't find him, so he went out toward a Fifth Avenue bus and made his way to Lawyer Whitney's office.

He received there a courteous reception, and upon introducing himself was taken into Whitney's private office and urged to sit down for a chat.

"I am here, Mr. Whitney," Stone said, slowly, "in the interests of Miss Janet Thurston."

"I am glad to hear it, Mr. Stone, for nobody has that lady's interests at heart more closely than I. Did she send for you?"

"Indirectly, yes. She wrote to Judge Payne, a mutual friend, and he asked me to look into things here. It's very terrible to think of that young girl so alone in the world."

"She has Mrs. Vincent to care for her, and——"

"Yes, of course. But I understand Mrs. Vincent is also under a cloud in regard to the Avery affair. What do you think about it, Mr. Whitney?"

"It's a difficult matter for me to think about at all. You see, I am a devoted friend of both of those ladies. Especially Miss Thurston. I cannot believe either of them really guilty. I can't help feeling that circumstantial evidence is at fault, somehow——"

"Of course it is,—it must be!" Stone agreed. "That girl never killed anybody, and why in the world should she?"

"True enough. And Mrs. Vincent had no reason, either. At least, so far as I know. But Gabrielle Vincent is a woman of the world, and she has

had affairs with various and sundry men, who—but there's no need for gossip. How do you propose to set to work, Mr. Stone, and how can I be of help to you?"

"I'm going to find the red-haired girl. To my mind she is the key to the whole situation. If she didn't kill George Converse, she knows who did."

"True. I've felt that all along. But how can you find her?"

"I think I shall start my search in George Converse's desk, or boxes of letters and private papers."

"The idea is good, but I'm told the police have gone into that pretty thoroughly."

The door opened just then and Kittinger came in.

Harrison Whitney introduced the two men, and smiled a little as he watched them size one another up.

Kittinger looked at Stone with a frank curiosity. He had heard of the great detective, and he almost expected to see some sort of physical freak.

Indeed, he seemed a bit disappointed that Fleming Stone looked much like other men.

As for Stone, he sized the lesser detective up in one brief glance.

Janet had told him that Kittinger had accomplished little or nothing, and, looking at him, Stone was not surprised.

"You can't find that girl," Kittinger declared, taking part in the conversation. "It's impossible. If she did the murder, or knows who did, she isn't going to come forward and tell. And if she is en-

tirely innocent, of course she wants to keep out of the limelight."

"Of course," agreed Stone. "Have you tried advertising?"

"For her? She wouldn't appear in answer to an advertisement."

"No, but I mean advertise for any one who may have seen her that night or any other time. Such a striking figure should be rather easily noticed and remembered."

"It might be," said Kittinger, doubtfully. "But I think if any one had seen her, he would come forward and tell."

"A promise of reward might sharpen a memory," said Stone, smiling a little. "However, let's hope to find her without that. May I count on your assistance, Mr. Kittinger?"

The man he addressed was only too glad to assent. He had always supposed these great detectives were very upstage, and preferred to work alone, and this suave, smiling gentleman, asking his coöperation, was a joyful surprise.

"I think," Stone went on, "that I shall not advise any advertisement quite yet,—not until I have seen Lloyd Converse, at any rate."

"Going there now?" asked Whitney. "I'll go with you."

"No, I can't go just now. I'm not sure when I'll time the visit. Suppose, Mr. Whitney, I work on my own to-day, and report here to-morrow. I feel

that though Miss Thurston has first claim on my reports, I am glad to submit them also to a man in authority, as you are, being the Converse lawyer."

"Yes, and I am more than that. I have always been friend as well as lawyer to the Converse family, and I am a friend of Mrs. Vincent and Jane Thurston. Then, too, I was a friend as well as employer of Alan Avery. So, you see, Mr. Stone, these deaths and disasters all come pretty close home to me. Do you connect the two cases?"

"I can't say positively yet, but I have a feeling that they are connected. Could it be that Avery learned too much of the truth and had to be put out of the way?"

"That might well be, but it presupposes more people involved than the red-haired girl, Lucille, as Mrs. Vincent whimsically calls her. One can imagine Lucille going to George Converse's home at midnight and shooting him, but it is hard to fancy her following up by killing Avery also."

"Yes, and, too, it would not be an easy matter to bring about Avery's death in the way it did come about."

"No. Well, I'm glad you're on the job, Mr. Stone, and I trust you will drop in here now and then and tell me of your progress."

When Stone left the lawyer's office, he did go straight to the jail to see Converse. He had disclaimed this intention because he did not wish for a companion, he wanted to go alone.

He found a haggard, broken-down man, a mere wreck of the gay, light-hearted chap who had come home from the mountains on that terrible night.

He welcomed Stone with joy.

"Thank God!" he cried. "There is at least a chance for us! Oh, Mr. Stone pray work as you never did before. Use all your cleverness, all your powers, but get me out of here! I am innocent, and my little girl is in danger."

Stone's evident sympathy and grave, calm demeanor quieted the excited prisoner, and by degrees he gave a coherent story of his own doings that night.

The detective was specially interested in the wet footprint. He believed the account exactly as Converse gave it, and remarked:

"It is a most interesting clue. I have never heard of one like it. Dropped handkerchiefs, broken cuff-links, initialed revolvers, all pale beside a unique clue like that! There was only one print?"

"I saw only one. Yes, had there been another, I must have noticed it."

"That footprint, Mr. Converse, will lead us straight to Lucille,—as they seem to call the red-haired girl. Now, I found a dried, squeezed-up washcloth in the bathroom. Do you know anything of that?"

"Why, that was on the washstand when I went in the bathroom first. It was wet then. I threw it in the hamper."

"It has been retrieved, by a detective doubtless,

and locked in the little wall cupboard. It may prove a valuable clue. You see, I am building up a picture of the red-haired girl, so I shall know her when we meet."

"You hope to find her, then?"

"I must, Mr. Converse. That is our only hope."

"You think she killed my brother?"

"I feel sure of it,—as sure as one can be of anything so uncertain. Now I'm going to track down that telegram. I wonder it hasn't been done before. It's a fake, I know, as far as you are concerned. But such an absurd one. Fancy putting 'Dear Brother' at the beginning of a telegram!"

"Yes, I know. That's one reason I felt sure the girl sent it. No man would think of such a thing. Mr. Stone, since I've been here alone, I just sit and think, and reconstruct that crime. I've had to realize, of course, that my brother did have women friends,—questionable ones. I must admit it is probable that they were, to more or less extent, birds of prey. I mean, they doubtless bled George for all the money they could get from him. So, now, I think this 'Lucille' came there late at night to get money from him. He must have refused her, probably had good reasons for doing so, and they quarrelled and she shot him. Then, as I see it, she was blood bespattered, and, let us say, especially on her feet and legs,—you know what short skirts they wear and she deliberately and cold-bloodedly took off her stockings and washed them and bathed her feet. It sounds

incredible, even fantastic, but it has a semblance of probability after all. Hasn't it?"

"More than a semblance, it is the only thing that could have happened. It may be that the woman took a complete tub bath, but that is immaterial. What you have outlined was, *must* have been her general procedure, and the proofs of it remained behind. Now, the footprint on the bath mat is of no evidential value as identification, but it is of enormous importance, in other ways. It proves the callous, calculating spirit of the murderer. One can imagine a woman flying into a passion and killing a man in the heat of anger, but the normal woman would then flee the place, with all speed. To remain and bathe proves a nature so abnormally hardened to all emotion or even decency that we must predicate a low type of personality, but combined with diabolical cunning and grim determination. That woman not only cleaned herself up and got out of the house, but went off with her head in the air, powdering her nose as she went. It is preposterous, but from the policeman's story we know that is what happened. It can't be otherwise."

"Can you find the woman?"

"I *must* find the woman. I shall never cease my efforts until I do."

"Good for you, Mr. Stone. Those are the first words of real cheer I have heard since I have been here. And as to Avery?"

"That must follow the other, I am almost certain

the two murders are not only connected, but the work of the same hand."

"Then Lucille knew Alan Avery, too?"

"I think so. But of course this is mere surmise. Give me Lucille, and the rest will make itself plain."

While Stone was visiting Converse, Janet was flying excitedly down to Mr. Whitney's office.

She burst in upon him with her wonderful news.

"Oh," she cried, as she found him alone, "I've had a letter from the red-haired girl!"

"What!" cried the lawyer, "when?"

"Just now," she replied, excitedly. "Mr. Stone came to see me, and after he left I was looking over some matters and fussing around the place, and then the postman came, and he brought—this!"

She spread out on the desk a strange-looking document.

It was a letter formed entirely of printed words, cut from newspapers or magazines and pasted into place.

It must have taken a long time to make, for the cutting was evenly done and the words were carefully aligned and neatly pasted.

It read:

"Don't look for me more. You never will find me. But to clear an innocent man I will confess I killed George Converse. I had good reasons. Give this to the police and tell them it is true. If you want proof remind Binns that a dog was barking near by. Also that I stumbled on the area step.

From the Red-haired Girl."

"Why, Miss Thurston, how strange! This is most important. What a looking epistle, but quite evidently genuine, for she offers Binns in proof. I shall take this straight to the police."

"Don't you think Mr. Stone ought to see it first?"

"He can see it any time. The police will show it to him. I think it should be taken down there immediately. Leave it with me, I will take it or send Kittinger."

"Do you believe it, Mr. Whitney? I mean, do you believe the red-haired girl sent it in good faith?"

"Of course I do, Janet. I think she has followed the case in the papers, and either her conscience awoke at last, or it was just a humane impulse to save an innocent man, as she says. Look, she has cut the words from all sorts of different periodicals. This may not be admitted as positive evidence but it at least throws a shadow of doubt on Lloyd's guilt and will go far toward helping his cause."

"Won't he be set free at once?"

"Hardly that, I'm afraid. But I'm glad this message is here. It will give a new turn to affairs and——"

"And through it we may trace Lucille!"

"That seems to me doubtful. Yet it may be. Now, you run along home, dear, and I'll get there as early to-night as I can."

"Can't I take that letter to show to Gay?"

"I don't want to delay it so long as that would

mean. I think I'll go down myself and lay it before Young. He's bound to pay attention to it."

"I thought nobody noticed anonymous letters?"

"This isn't quite an anonymous letter. The sender withholds her name, but we know who she is, in a way, you see. Anyhow, it must be attended to."

"May I go with you?" she asked, a little timidly.

"Indeed, yes. I'd love to have you. Ready now?"

"Yes," and Janet glowed with excitement at the thought of going to the Police Headquarters.

They were welcomed by Young, who received them in a private office and placed a chair for Janet.

"For goodness' sake!" was his homely exclamation as he saw the letter. "Well, wouldn't that jar you! I felt all along we'd hear from that creature sooner or later. Do you know, Mr. Whitney, I think this is the real article."

"Meaning?"

"That the red-haired girl really wrote it,—that is, pasted it up, and also, that she really killed George Converse."

"And is the rest of it true, that we shall never find her?"

"I'm afraid it is. How can we find her? Any woman clever enough to commit that murder and get away with it, and then to concoct this here billydoo, isn't going to let herself get caught!"

"It certainly looks so."

"But Mr. Young," said Janet, wistfully, "can't

you deduce from the letter itself anything about the personality of the girl?"

"Don't see how I can, Miss Thurston," the detective returned.

He was studying the letter. It required two sheets of large paper to hold the words. For some were larger than others. Some were made up of two or three portions, sometimes in varying type.

For instance the name Converse was formed by using *Con,* cut from some word in a paper, while the *Verse* showed a capital *V* as if the writer, unable to find the word elsewhere had used the heading of a column of *Verse.*

Area was formed obviously, from the word *are* cut out, and followed by an *a* of different type.

"Clever," muttered Young, "darned clever! Must have taken a long time, too. Lady of leisure, probably. Well, Mr. Whitney, you'll leave this with us, I suppose."

"Yes. What effect will it have upon the fate of Lloyd Converse?"

"Too soon to say. But it may do good, in that it must at least throw a shadow of doubt on his own guilt. I'll take up the matter and let you know when there's anything to report."

And with that they were forced to be content.

"Do all you can, won't you?" said Janet, turning back, wistfully, as they neared the door.

"Trust me for that, Miss Thurston," replied Young.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TELLTALE LETTER

THERE was much discussion in the Whitney home that evening regarding the letter from Lucille, as Gay persisted in calling the red-haired girl.

Janet was hopeful of good results from it, and Whitney, too, was jubilant over the fact that it must, at least, cast a doubt on Lloyd's guilt, if it did not entirely free him from suspicion.

But Lady Gay scoffed at it.

"I'd be only too glad to believe in it," she said, "but I can't help thinking it's a fake or prank of some foolish-minded outsider. There are always such people, ready to do spectacular things, and sometimes they make a lot of trouble."

"This can't make trouble," Janet said, "if it merely delays or modifies the action of the law toward Lloyd, that's all I hope for from it. Of course, it can't lead to the discovery of Lucille herself, she's too cute for that. But if Binns recollects that a dog was barking, and that the girl stumbled on the step, we shall have to admit that this was written by Lucille herself. For no one else could know of those incidents."

"That's true," Gay agreed. "Haven't you seen Binns yet?"

"No," said Whitney, "but I'm going to try to reach him by telephone."

He didn't succeed in this, but he did get hold of the police and he learned after some delay, that Binns had corroborated these things absolutely.

He had declared a dog was barking loudly at the moment in question and he remembered the red-haired girl stumbling a little on the area step.

This, therefore, settled the question as to the authorship of the letter.

It must have been sent by the girl and there could be no reason for it, but the one she expressed, to save the life of an innocent man.

"Who do you suppose she is?" Janet said, looking at Whitney.

"That we shall probably never know. She has gone to such pains to conceal her identity, that I'm sure she can never be traced. I've heard before of messages made by cutting words from a newspaper, but I never heard of such a lengthy screed worked up in that way. It must have been a monumental piece of labor."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mrs. Mortimer. "Given a quick wit, which she must have, and plenty of papers, it wouldn't take so very long to select and cut out the words, and the pasting up is nothing."

"It seems a big task to me," Whitney said. "But you women are more given to little fussy work. Well, I'm glad it came. I hope it will cheer Lloyd up a bit."

"I'm not satisfied yet," Janet persisted, "I want to track down that girl by means of that letter. Why not trace the paper or the postmark?"

"She's too clever to leave a loophole," Gay declared. "I've no doubt it was most ordinary paper, and mailed at some street corner, far from where she really lives."

"Yes, that is doubtless the truth," Whitney agreed. "That girl's doings all the way through have been marked by the utmost perspicacity and foresight. I can't think we'll ever be one jot nearer discovering her identity than we are this minute."

The next morning Janet went over to her apartment directly after she had breakfasted. She didn't ask Gay to go with her this time, for she wanted to see Fleming Stone by herself.

He came according to appointment, and she told him about the letter from the red-haired girl.

He was deeply interested at once.

"Where is the letter?" he asked.

"We gave it to the police," Janet replied. "The letter said to do so."

"Then," said Stone, "I must go there and see it. A letter is a whole story,—an open book. One may read everything from a letter."

"Not this letter," and Janet smiled sadly. "For there is not a word of writing on it, either penned or typed. It is all made of words cut from printed pages."

"And the address?"

"That, too, is formed of words cut out and pasted on."

"Even so, it must tell a story of some sort. Nobody could make such an elaborate confection without leaving signs of the maker's personality. What papers were the words cut from?"

"I've no idea," Janet said. "They were just words from newspapers."

"All alike,—that is all from the same paper?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Oh, do go to see it, Mr. Stone. Perhaps you can read more from it than we did!"

"Perhaps so. You see, Miss Thurston, the red-haired girl was disguised. Probably she hasn't red hair at all."

Janet showed her surprise.

"Why in the world do you say that? Binns seemed to think her red hair was her principal characteristic."

"Yes, that's one reason why I think it isn't. Now, see here. Think it out. She carried a small suit-case."

"Yes, and I can't understand that. If she went there to call on George, to extort money, as they all seem to think, why carry a suit-case?"

"Well, that question might have a lot of answers. But she did carry a suit-case when she came away. We have no reason to doubt Binn's word as to that. Also, and here's the point, though small it was heavy. Binns said that, too."

"I know he did. I don't see how he could tell that by merely seeing it."

"Oh, yes, he could judge by the way she lifted it,—as he put it, by the way she hefted it. Now, for a suit-case to be heavy enough to make that point so obvious, it must have been very heavy indeed, in proportion to its size. And here's a question for you. What made it so heavy?"

"I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea!"

"Oh, yes, you have. You must have. For it was you who discovered that."

"I! Discovered that! What do you mean?"

"It was heavy because it contained those two flatirons."

"The flatirons! But why would she carry those off?"

"Can't you see?"

"No,—oh, tell me, Mr. Stone, why would she steal the flatirons?"

"To weight the suit-case. Because she meant to throw the suit-case away, in the water,—in Central Park, probably,—because it would have in it her disguise. Her red wig and any other parts of her costume that were disguise."

Janet simply looked her amazement.

"You see, her hair was not only flaming red, but bushy and prominent. Now the chorus girls aren't wearing bushy, longish bobs now, they're short and close. This flaming red thatch was a wig. Also probably the hat and the vanity case,—all so much in

evidence, were meant to impress Binns with a personality totally different from the real character of the red-haired girl."

"Do you mean then, that she wanted to be seen by Binns?"

"Either that, or she took such precautions that if she should be seen by him or by any one, the impression she made would be anything but that of her true self."

"I begin to see. Now, Binns says she was rather large and stout,—so she may not have been a chorus girl at all, but an older woman, masquerading as a modern up-to-date girl!"

"You grasp an idea very quickly, Miss Thurston. That is quite true. Supposing she went there with intent to kill George Converse, would it not be clever to come away as a different person. Then, but this is only assumption, she could cross right over to Central Park, go in the Ninety-sixth Street entrance and shedding her wig and so forth, put them in the already weighted suit-case and, watching her chance, drop it in the reservoir. Then she could go home."

"And that's how it happened——"

"That's how I think it happened. I may be all wrong. But to my mind, those missing flatirons and that small, heavy suit-case can have no other meaning. Even supposing she came to retrieve incriminating letters or on some such blackmailing errand, there would be no reason for the weighted suit-case. She would take her evidence home with her."

"I see,—since you have explained so fully. Oh, Mr. Stone, can you find her? Knowing all you do, can't you track her down,—get her confession and free Lloyd Converse entirely?"

"That is my hope, Miss Thurston," Stone said, gravely. "But we have a very clever adversary to cope with. If the same one killed both George Converse and Alan Avery, we have a criminal of deepest dye and of extraordinary intellect."

"More than one, perhaps. I mean, perhaps it is the work of a ring or gang of murderers."

"Perhaps. Now, I am going to see that letter. Do you care to go with me?"

"Yes, indeed. But I promised Mr. Whitney I'd look in there this morning and tell him what you thought about it as evidence."

"Very well, let us stop there, and then go along on our errand."

They found Mr. Whitney in his office and greatly interested in Fleming Stone's theories and deductions.

If the lawyer didn't subcribe entirely to the detective's findings, he did not say so, but listened courteously to the story.

His attention wandered a little as he let his gaze fall on Janet.

The girl was looking wonderfully lovely. Her eyes glowed with the new hope that Fleming Stone had already awakened in her heart, and she was impatient to have him go on with his investigations.

"We're going to see the police about the letter,"

she said, to Whitney, her voice throbbing with excitement. "Won't you go, too,—and then you can take us in your car!"

"My dear child, you must think I've no business of my own!" Whitney exclaimed, in mock dismay. But the lure of her eyes and the charm of her smile proved too much for him, and with a sudden gesture he pulled down the top of his desk and rose to get his hat and coat.

The trio set forth in the lawyer's luxurious car and Janet sank back in the cushions greatly pleased at this mode of progress.

"I do hate a taxicab," she said, "that is, if I can have a car instead."

They found Young awaiting them, but he seemed to take far less interest in the pasted up letter than Fleming Stone did.

"I think," the detective said, "I should like to have Binns called to come here."

Young looked surprised, but he sent a messenger for the policeman without further question.

"This letter is a marvel," Stone said, after he had scrutinized the missive, both envelope and enclosure.

"I think so, too," agreed Whitney. "Imagine the peculiar type of mind that would go to all that trouble to conceal its identity."

"That's the beauty of it," Stone said, with a quiet smile, "the identity is not concealed."

"Not concealed!" echoed Young, in amazement.

"No," Stone said, "not concealed. But revealed."

"Explain, will you, please." Young spoke a little curtly.

Fleming Stone explained.

"First of all," he said slowly, "we must realize that we are up against one of the cleverest, most ingenious minds in the world."

"Surprising, in a chorus girl!" observed Whitney, not sneeringly, but obviously dubious.

"Yes, if it is the mind of a chorus girl. But here is our platform. We are out to find the murderer of George Converse and of Alan Avery. For those two were victims of the same hand. The first thing I felt sure of, when I took up this matter, was that Lloyd Converse was innocent."

"Why were you so sure of that?" asked Young, curiously.

"For one thing, because I saw at once that he is not capable of shooting another from behind. That is the act of a cur——"

"Or a woman," put in Young.

"Possibly, if the woman has the nature of a cur. But Lloyd Converse would never do that. He might kill a man in fair fight, or even in the heat of passion, but it would be from the front, not the back. Anyway that's my opinion of him. Then, too, the whole story of Lloyd Converse rings true. He never sent a telegram beginning 'Dear Brother'! That is so supremely ridiculous that it

proves the telegram a fake at once. And granted a faked telegram, we must look for deceit and trickery all along the line. And the trickery of a master criminal. Of a diabolically clever mind and fiendishly ingenious brain."

"In a chorus girl?" said Young, incredulously.

"Perhaps. But think carefully. Your chorus girl was rather stout than slim, rather tall than short, rather large than small, and with bushy, flaming red hair. Ah, here comes Binns. I'm glad of that."

The policeman was admitted, and took a seat with the rest.

Stone repeated in his hearing the description he had just given and added, "That right, Binns?"

"To a dot, sir."

"And walked with a breezy air and—well, let us say, an athletic manner?"

"Yes, sir."

"And swung a small suit-case, as if it were a bit heavy?"

"Just that, sir."

"Then, Binns, listen. I put it to you that the red-haired girl was a man in woman's clothing."

"Right, sir! That's just what she was! It's dumb I am not to think of that myself!"

"You feel sure of it?"

"I do. Now that I look back, I wonder how I could have missed it!"

"Then, let us drop the fiction of the red-haired girl, and put our minds on the man who personated

her. And we have a full description of him right here before us."

As he spoke, Stone took up the pasted letter and held it up to view.

"A description!" exclaimed Whitney, who was amazed at these revelations.

"Yes. You have all heard of the French police term, *'le portrait parle.'* They go further than the Bertillon measurements and make what they call a speaking portrait by a description of the subject in detail. Well, there could be no better or truer portrait of the criminal we are seeking than is contained in this letter before us."

"I'm from Missouri," Young declared. "Go ahead, Mr. Stone."

They were all fascinated, not only by the matter of Stone's discourse but by his impressive manner.

Not in the least dramatic or ostentatious, but speaking simply and straightforwardly, he held them by the spell of his own confidence and surety.

"From this letter alone, I know that the one who made it is a man, not a woman. Is not young, but fairly well along in years. Is of gentle, refined birth and breeding, is a New Yorker, is not of frivolous tendencies, but is of a scientific mind, also of literary bent, of fastidious tastes and has a wide scope of knowledge and literature. He is a professional man, and is meticulously careful about the fittings and appointments of his desk. He is apparently strong and healthy but is not really well,

and he is as deeply dyed a villain as ever walked this earth."

The indignation and righteous wrath in Stone's voice as he finished, caused them all to look up quickly.

The detective's face was fairly blazing as he made his final declaration and he waved the letter at the astonished crowd as if he were brandishing a weapon of revenge against the sender of it.

Detective Young was deeply impressed, but he had long ago schooled himself to conceal his emotions, so he merely said, quietly:

"You know him?"

"I do," replied Fleming Stone. "He is in this room. He has the murderer's cold steel-blue eyes, the murderer's prominent, muscular jaw and the murderer's thick-lobed ears. Also the murderer's forehead, with its furrowed lines sloping upward to a point."

The other four looked at Harrison Whitney.

Whether a sense of his own guilt overcame him or whether it was reaction to Stone's scathing words, he looked the picture of abject terror.

Janet recoiled in horror, unable to believe her senses.

Binns, with a dawning recognition on his face, nodded his head in affirmation, and Young, greatly excited, but determined not to show it, said with all the calmness he could muster:

"You are prepared to substantiate this, Mr. Stone?"

"Is that needed?" Fleming Stone asked, quietly. "Does not Mr. Whitney's attitude speak for itself?"

"It does," the lawyer said, "and I shall speak for myself. I prefer making my own confession to having it dragged from me. I killed George Converse, and I killed Alan Avery. There is no further use in secrecy."

Young watched him carefully as he pressed a button that brought a stenographer to the scene.

Whitney saw this, but it seemed to please him rather than otherwise. He was almost like a man about to relate a meritorious achievement.

"There were two people in my way," he said arrogantly, "and they had to be removed. George Converse I got rid of, and then I took care that Lloyd Converse should also be put away. But Alan Avery became too officious and efficient both, and so he had to go, too. I killed George Converse because I had misappropriated his fortune, or rather placed it in jeopardy, from which it may or may not emerge. Alan Avery I killed, because he knew this, and also was on the point of discovering that I had killed George. Lloyd Converse I put behind bars because I wanted his girl."

This last speech, with an insolent look at Janet made Stone's blood boil. But he realized that it was no time for speech, and he kept silent while the depraved man ranted on.

"I planned it all perfectly. I was the red-haired girl, I did for George and then I took the flatirons

to weight the suitcase that was to contain my disguise. It was my wet footprint on the bath mat——"

"How did that happen?" asked the alert Young.

"It happened because my woman's costume was so clever that it was too clever. I planned, after the deed was done, to dress in the girl's clothes I had brought in the suit-case and had left downstairs."

"You had an appointment with George then?"

"Yes, of course. I sent him a telegram, signed with my own name, to come up from Long Island on important business and I would call on him in his home at eleven o'clock. After he was dead, I took that telegram from his pocket and substituted the other, which I had previously sent to myself. As you see, I omitted nothing, I left no loophole for discovery—that is, for an ordinary intelligence. When this super-sleuth came along——"

He shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who has accepted defeat, and then went on:

"My clever feminine costume provided no long stockings, for I couldn't well get them. So, knowing the type of stockings the girls wear, I concluded to risk my bare legs and wear my evening pumps, which I of course, had on.

"Further than that, I had only a plain short skirt and the red wig. My coat was my own light overcoat. This was planned all right, but when I discovered some splashes of my victim's blood on the instep of my right foot, I couldn't go without cleaning it. Half unconsciously, I tore off the soap wrap-

per and bathed my foot and leg, making the wet imprint.

"It was just then, I heard the front door open and Lloyd came in. I gathered up everything, and hurried down the back stairs to the kitchen. There I had time enough to dress at my leisure. I went out, dropping the little handkerchief on purpose, to fog up things. It was one I found in a subway train. Then, once outside,—I had waited for Binns, and of course I had provided myself with a padlock key long before,—I flaunted my way out, ostentatiously using the vanity box and swaggering a bit, in order to fasten my appearance in the memory of the policeman."

"Having taken the flatirons?"

"Yes, of course. Then, I merely went into the park, hid behind some trees, changed back into my own togs,—I had a cap in my pocket,—put wig, skirt, vanity case, and girl's hat in the suit-case with the flatirons, and pitched it into the deep waters of the reservoir. Then I went home."

The man paused, actually looking about from one to another of his hearers, as if expecting applause.

Fleming Stone spoke gravely:

"Your crime was certainly the conception of a master mind. It is a pity your ingenuity was not put to a better purpose."

"It was put to the purpose nearest my heart," returned Whitney, obstinately and with a glance at Janet.

The girl forbore to look at him. She recoiled from all thought of him or his deeds, but at this moment her great desire was to get away from the rest and go to tell Lloyd of the great news.

But she heard Stone speaking again.

"It is said all criminals overlook at least one small clue. The one that escaped your attention, Mr. Whitney was small indeed. It was merely the squeezed-up washcloth. You left it in a tightly compressed wad on the washstand in the bathroom. Lloyd Converse tossed it in the hamper there, and your own detective retrieved it and put it away."

"You needn't tell me a thing like that retained fingerprints!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"No, but it incriminated you all the same. Few men, and probably no women leave a washcloth like that. It is usual to shake it out and hang it up. I interviewed your laundress and I learned that it is habitual with you to leave your washcloth like that. So, that was a very positive clue, after all. You engaged the detective Kittinger, because he is a numskull, or pretends to be one, it doesn't matter which. How did you come to think of impersonating a woman?"

Again Harrison Whitney showed that attitude of pride in achievement, which, though thoroughly detestable, was in keeping with his character.

"It came to me suddenly, one day, as I chanced upon some pictures in the paper of a foreign prince who was visiting this country. He had taken part

in private theatricals, or something of the sort, and as a girl, with a wig of bushy, bobbed hair, he was so convincing that I began to think I could carry off such a disguise. The costume was so easy. I only needed a scant, plain skirt, and a small, close hat. I secured those and the wig from a costumer's shop."

"And the blue beads? That belonged to Miss Thurston's string. Did you try to incriminate her?"

"No!" and Whitney glared at the detective. "I had those in my possession and I dropped them on the floor hoping to incriminate Lloyd Converse more deeply. I had but the one idea, to make him responsible for the murder of his brother. And I would have succeeded, had you kept out of this thing!"

"Thank God I didn't keep out, then," said Fleming Stone, fervently. "Now, are you going to make a clean breast of the Avery murder? How did you accomplish that?"

"Too easy," Whitney said, speaking almost nonchalantly, yet with that same perverted vanity. "He left me that night to go to call on Mrs. Vincent and Miss Thurston. He had already learned too much, far too much of my doings, and I had to get rid of him. You see, my idea was to manage to get Lloyd Converse out of the way. I thought that by some such ruse as the letter I pasted up, I could divert suspicion from him enough to cause reasonable doubt. I didn't want him to go to the chair, but if he were imprisoned for life, I could, I felt sure, win the bride I desired. Then, George out of the way, I had full

control of the Converse fortune. In fact, it was all clear sailing, save for Avery. So he had to go. As he left the office, he chanced to refer to his soda mints, which he took for indigestion. He showed me two, in his waistcoat pocket. So, having my poison tablets handy, when I helped him on with his overcoat, I deftly substituted two of the poison tablets for his soda mints. I am rather good at sleight of hand work. Of course, when he drank that high-ball, he had unostentatiously placed his two supposed soda mints in his mouth."

"But we found two good soda mints in that pocket after he was dead," exclaimed Young.

"Yes, I put them there, when I looked over his clothing to find them," returned Whitney, with the greatest coolness. "You see, they looked just alike, the soda mints and the poison tablets. Wait, I'll show you."

From his own pocket he produced two small white tablets, and even as Stone sprang toward him, he popped them in his mouth, smiled diabolically at them all and fell over in his chair.

"He's done it!" cried Young. "He cheated us of his life!"

And he had. The arch criminal had succeeded in eluding the vengeance due him, and had taken the law into his own hands.

Janet gave a faint gasp, and buried her face in her hands.

Binns called some assistants and carried the dead man from the room.

"Just a few more words, please, Mr. Stone," Young said to him, "and then I will let you and Miss Thurston go to tell Mr. Lloyd Converse of these new developments. I feel sure Miss Thurston would like to be the one to carry the news to him."

A grateful smile from Janet replied to this, and Stone said:

"I'll give you a few moments, Mr. Young, but I am a busy man and I am due on another case as soon as I can get there."

"Then won't you please tell me how you gathered all that from this pasted up letter."

Young laid the queer looking missive on the table before him.

Fleming Stone smiled.

"He who runs may read," he said. "I had already concluded, Mr. Young, that the Converse murder was a carefully planned affair, and the work of a deep, crafty man. It didn't seem at all possible that a woman had done it. However, the pasted letter gave itself away entirely because of the periodicals used. I have the same memory for newspaper or magazine type that I have for handwriting. I can recognize at a glance the type of any periodical if I have ever seen it before. And all the print used in this letter is well known to me. I saw at the first reading the type of *The Saturday Evening Post,* the *Sun,* the *Scientific American, Life,* the *Atlantic*

Monthly, The Yale Review, and *The Strand.* So I had to deduce a cultured, intellectual man from those. There is also part of one word from a popular mystery magazine, proving his interest in crime in fiction. These things proved a man not young, for no very young man nowadays reads those erudite journals. I assumed him a New Yorker because of the New York evening paper, which he used more than any other one periodical. His neatness I deduced from the careful precision with which the pasting is done, the alignment and margins being exact and true. His desk is doubtless well fitted, for he seemed to have at hand the best paste, sharp shears and clean blotters or cloths to press with. You see there is no botch or smear on the whole letter. The exception to perfect alignment is a slight tendency of the finished lines of print to slant downward. This is scarcely perceptible, but in writing it is infallible evidence of approaching illness, and it may well have been in this case."

"It is amazing, Mr. Stone."

"Oh, no, it is very obvious. Note the address. The *Miss* is half the word *Missing* which appears every week in a certain magazine. For Janet he cut *Jan* from some *January* paper and the surname, he built up, as I saw at once from a copy of the revered *Boston Transcript.* From a date line, you see. The *Thurs* is from *Thursday,* and the *ton* from *Boston.*"

"Oh," cried Janet, "Mr. Whitney has the *Transcript* once a week! And all the other papers you have

mentioned are always in his library. And he worked all night, his sister said, the night before this letter was sent!"

"Yes. Well, Mr. Young, anything more?"

"No, sir. I think everything else can be looked after here. I suppose Mrs. Vincent can explain that letter she sent to Avery——"

"I can," said Janet. "It wasn't to Mr. Avery at all. It was to Mr. Whitney. Mrs. Vincent was rather friendly with him some years ago and that letter she wrote to him at that time. He must have kept it and pretended he found it in Mr. Avery's desk. I knew all about it, but I didn't want to tell anything that might make trouble for Mrs. Vincent."

"I see," said Young. "And the photograph of Avery in your apartment was of course, smuggled in there somehow by Whitney himself."

"Yes," Janet sighed. "I had begun to have some slight suspicion of Mr. Whitney; that's why I consented to go to his house for a time. I would brave anything to help the cause of Mr. Converse."

"What gave you the first definite hint of the truth, Mr. Stone?" asked Young, loath to let the interesting man depart.

"The missing flatirons and the heavy suit-case," replied the detective, promptly. "To me that combination spelled the hiding of a disguise. Then I realized the great criminal brain back of it all, and I went hard at work. But the letter came and laid all bare. I hold that detective work is about one-

third brain and two-thirds luck. That letter was luck. Come, Miss Thurston, I think we must be off now."

It was a joyous journey, which ended in a lovers' meeting. After a few words of congratulation, Fleming Stone went on his way, leaving Lloyd and Janet together, until official word came to release him.

Together they walked out into the sunshine, and as Lloyd Converse breathed again the outer air, a free man, he said, with new conviction:

"Truth is mighty and must prevail."

"With the right assistance," supplemented Janet, smiling up at him.

THE END